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REVIEW
OUTRUN 2
The king of the road is back

REVIEWED

R: RACING EVOLUTION
[PS2/XB/GC]

DEUS EX: INVISIBLE WAR
[XB/PC]

FINAL FANTASY: CRYSTAL CHRONICLES
[GC]

FORBIDDEN SIREN
[PS2]

NIGHTSHADE
[PS2]

GOD SAVE THE SCENE

Have the Brits gone soft?

180 PAGES OF OH-SO-PRETTY GAMING


eMag

You'd never guess it, but those Ferrari keys don't belong to anyone who works on **games™**. By a strange quirk of fate none of us have managed to succumb to the automotive loveliness of Italian sports cars. The closest we get to driving a Ferrari (short of handling those keys) is by playing videogames.

Tapping into our fantasies – or playing on our inadequacies, if you want to be cynical about it – is nothing new and it's one of the reasons why, unfortunately, games are occasionally vilified in the media. But sidestepping that perilous issue (after all, we're all right-minded gamers who wouldn't hurt a fly) it's interesting to note that with the release of *OutRun 2* so little has really changed over the years – our dreams and desires, no matter how outlandish, can all be sated to a degree with videogames. And while we're not suggesting that they mirror the true experience, it's a step in the right direction, eh?

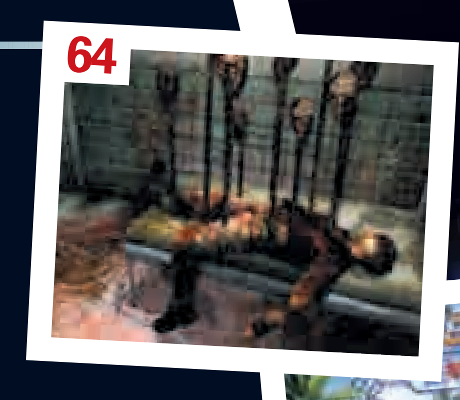
Simon Phillips, Group Editor




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but has it been worth the wait?

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FIND OUT WHERE TO GET THE ESSENTIAL STORIES WITH OUR QUICK GUIDE TO THE NEWS

THE JAPANESE GIANT ANNOUNCES ITS NEW CONSOLE

NINTENDO'S SCREEN TEST

When Nintendo hinted last year that it would be unveiling a new product for 2004, gamers immediately began to speculate about what form the new hardware would take. Everything from the *Donkey Konga* drums to a handheld GameCube was mentioned, but few people expected the curve ball that Nintendo has thrown. A recent statement from the company proudly announced that its new Nintendo DS (a working title) would be unveiled at this year's E3 and that gamers should prepare for "innovative advancements in game interaction".

So far this 'advancement' definitely involves two three-inch TFT screens, though little more is known about the console. This isn't the first time Nintendo has worked with dual screens – the Game & Watch and Virtual Boy both used them – though the company has promised that this system will revolutionise handheld gaming. "Players can look forward to being able to manage their game progress from two different perspectives, enhancing both the speed and strategy of the challenge," said Nintendo president Satoru Iwata. Presumably this means that one screen will display the full game (such as the entire track on a racing game, for instance) while the other will highlight one player.

There may also be the possibility to join the screens together. While this is a very interesting proposal, we have to wonder whether anyone but Nintendo and its first-party developers will work with this format. Konami and Namco have expressed their support, but two developers can't make a console.

Other hardware specifications are also a concern, as it looks like the DS will only be marginally more powerful than the GBA. We know the new console will be powered by two

"PLAYERS CAN LOOK FORWARD TO BEING ABLE TO MANAGE THEIR GAME PROGRESS FROM TWO DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES, ENHANCING BOTH THE SPEED AND STRATEGY OF THE CHALLENGE"

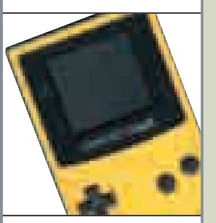


processors – an ARM9 and an ARM7 – and have a 1Gb memory, but this is hardly the handheld GameCube that some had expected. There has also been heated debate about the machine's control system. Iwata-san's announcement that "we have developed Nintendo DS based upon a completely different concept from existing game devices in order to provide players with a unique entertainment experience for the 21st Century" has prompted some people to speculate that the DS may boast unconventional controls – perhaps something along the lines of Sony's EyeToy, or some other motion-sensing device.

This new console will have its work cut out if it's to overshadow the PSP – particularly if the rumours about Sony's machine having increased RAM are true (see page 39). Though with a so-far-unbeaten record of success in the handheld market is it time for Nintendo to push the boat out? We'll know more after E3.



The original. And best?



A bold step forward.



Reinventing the wheel.



The ultimate Game Boy.

NINTENDO – ON THE UP OR OVER THE HILL?

The announcement of the DS has sent our Expectation Meter off the scale, but we're not sure whether it's for all the right reasons. This could be Nintendo's finest hour, but after the high of the GBA SP, it's got a long way to fall…

WE LOVE IT ALREADY

☐ Who cares if the PSP is some multi-functional, game-DVD-MP3 hybrid? We want innovative and interesting games that will enthuse and excite us. Nintendo has never let us down in the past, and as far as the handheld market is concerned it's been unbeatable. The possibilities for the dual screens are endless and we're already salivating at the thought of their E3 debut. Imagine being able to play a game like *Mario & Luigi*, but with both characters starting in completely different places (like the classic *Head Over Heels*). Or how about being able to play *Final Fantasy: Crystal Chronicles* properly – let's face it, no one has access to that many GBAs and link cables. You might even be able to play two-player games on one machine – rather like sharing a joypad to play *Micro Machines* – thanks to the DS's innovative set-up. Our heads spin just thinking about it and you know that the launch games are going to show the new machine off in all its glory. Add to this the gyroscopic control rumours that continue to circulate – Iwata-san insists that the DS "will enable fun and movement not seen before" – and it's fair to say that E3 can't come soon enough.

IT WILL NEVER WORK

☐ Despite our interest in the Nintendo DS, we can't help feeling that the whole venture could go horribly wrong for Nintendo. Considering Nintendo has already stated that the DS will not be competing against the PSP, Sony's machine could muscle into the handheld market. We're also unconvinced about support for the new machine. Sure, Konami and Namco may already be backing the system but how long will we have to wait before that second screen gets used as something more than somewhere to display your current map? There's also a nagging doubt that the DS is little more than a gimmick – something to keep the crowds occupied until the true successor to the Game Boy Advance appears. It's all very well Iwata-san stating that the DS will "become the third pillar, next to GameCube and Game Boy" but we're not sure if Nintendo can support a third console (we're pretty certain the handheld market can't). Kudos to Nintendo for wanting to cling to traditional values and just make games machines, but its GameCube has already proved that this isn't what the public wants. We really want the DS to invigorate and excite the industry, but we can't help but think that Nintendo is setting itself up for a big fall.

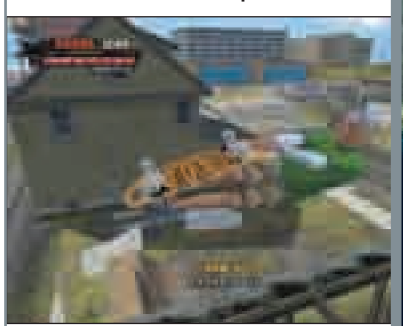
Data Stream

BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



YOUR FACE HERE

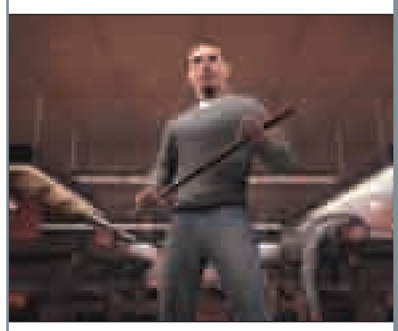
Although players of such titles as *Tony Hawk's Underground* already have the option to send a digital mugshot of themselves to Digimask, who will then return a polygonal version of their face for character-personalisation purposes, a deal has finally been struck with Sony to enable the same process to be carried out using the EyeToy's imaging capabilities. While the technology won't be backwards-compatible with existing titles, developers are being urged to incorporate the system into future projects with character-customisation capabilities.





AUSSIE GETAWAY

With London-based developer Team Soho due to complete work on the sequel to Cockney gangster epic *The Getaway* before the end of the year, director of the technically impressive original, Brendan McNamara, has made a getaway of his own to Australia to set up sister studio Team Bondi. Adding to the increasingly strong line-up of softcos in McNamara's homeland, he has been joined by several members of *The Getaway* team who are working on a PS3 title.





HALF LIFE, FULL INVESTIGATION

FBI RAIDS HOME IN STATES AS HALF-LIFE 2 GOES ON SALE IN RUSSIA

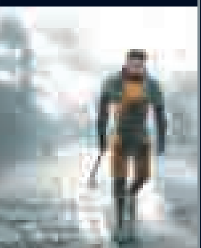
The investigation into Valve Software's leaked *Half-Life 2* source code has been stepped up a gear following the discovery of copies of the game in a store in Russia. A two-disc pirated edition of the title was seen on sale in the Siberian capital Novosibirsk. It's believed that this version is based on the code that was leaked last year, although the game has been slightly tweaked and translated into Russian. Technology website theinquirer.net carried pictures of the Russian game's packaging and reported that the game was fully playable although there were several plot inconsistencies – presumably where the code was unfinished.

Meanwhile, in the US the FBI is now involved in the search for the hackers. In the middle of January the organisation carried out a dawn raid on the home of San Francisco computer programmer Chris Toshok. FBI agents called at Toshok's home, as reported by Toshok in his online blog, with search warrants and accompanied by members of the American secret service.

"I looked down out of the glare of the flashlight and saw the FBI badge of the long-haired blonde woman standing in front of me," Toshok writes. "I also saw two people behind her, bodies turned sideways so as to present less of a target. Guns drawn? It was too hard to tell really with the glare of the flashlight, but I'm assuming yes."

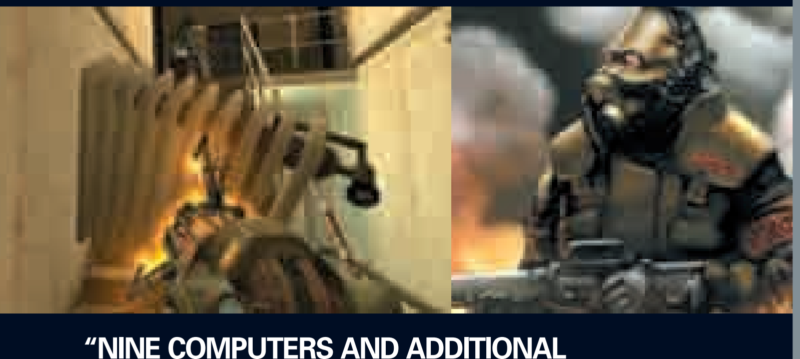
The five-page search warrant entitled Toshok's unexpected visitors to remove any items of software or hardware that either contained evidence of, or were used as, "instrumentalities of criminal activity". More specifically, the agents were looking for "any IP addresses related to any of the Valve internal or external networks", "Email addresses including any addresses with the '@valvesoftware.com' domain" and "Valve passwords and/or user names". The warrant also authorised the seizure of any documentation concerning "Valve Software, *Half-Life*, *Half-Life 2*, *Team Fortress*, *Team Fortress 2*, *Counter-Strike* and *Condition Zero*."

Nine computers and additional miscellaneous equipment (including CDs, an Xbox and several hard drives) were taken from Toshok's home, although no charges have yet been brought. Toshok maintains his innocence, although he is known to be involved with a group called the Hungry



Gordon Freeman 'disappointed' with hackers.





“NINE COMPUTERS AND ADDITIONAL MISCELLANEOUS EQUIPMENT (INCLUDING CDS, AN XBOX AND SEVERAL HARD DRIVES) WERE TAKEN FROM TOSHOK’S HOME, ALTHOUGH NO CHARGES HAVE YET BEEN BROUGHT”



The pirated Russian edition of *Half-Life 2* is incomplete in places, but is otherwise playable.

Programmers which has been implicated in piracy in the past.

Seeing as pirated copies of *Half-Life 2* are now available in shops, it’s perhaps not surprising that ‘extreme measures’ are being taken. However, the involvement of the FBI and secret service suggests that this matter is being taken more seriously that we thought. Regardless of whether Toshok had anything to do with the Valve leak, the raid on his home is sure to send shockwaves throughout the pirate community. However, if this raid was a false alarm, the real perpetrators may be driven further underground.

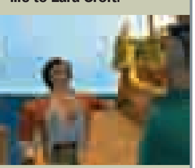
Half-Life 2 is now scheduled for a summer 2004 release, though in light of recent events further delays wouldn’t be entirely unexpected. Chris Toshok’s blog of the FBI raid can be found at http://uninteresting.myby.co.uk/siezed.html

WHY ARE WE WAITING?

Half-Life 2 isn’t the only title to languish in development hell. Other games have taken a fair amount of time to get to the shelves (if at all).

GALLEON

It’s been a long haul for Toby Gard, but his difficult second project is nearly ready for a global release. The exploits of Captain Rhama are already looking impressive and we’re hoping that the long wait is justified. After all, this is the man who gave life to Lara Croft.



HEART OF DARKNESS

Originally due for release on the Amiga 500, *Heart Of Darkness* finally appeared on the PlayStation in 1998. While the game certainly looked very nice, the gameplay was extremely dated and made for a frustrating experience.

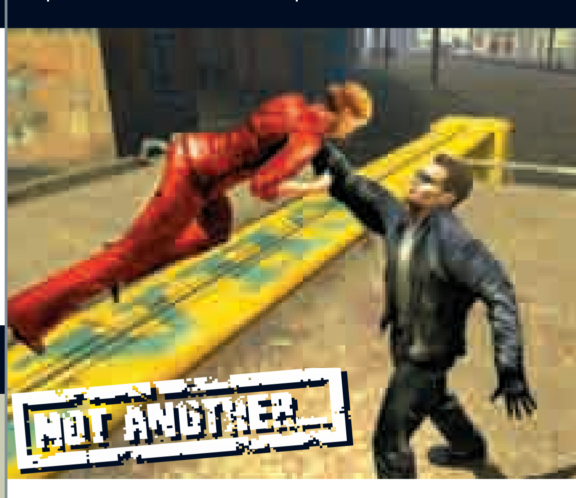


DUKE NUKEM FOREVER

Duke Nukem has been in development since time began, and cynics say we’ll never see it. But the official site remains open and adamantly promises that Duke is on his way. After all this time it better be good…

MALICE

Malice has a happier story. Conceived as an Xbox launch title, the game promised to be a quirky platformer. Despite being dropped by Argonaut’s publishers before Christmas, the red-haired minx and her giant hammer should appear this year.



NOT ANOTHER…

‘PHANTOM’ STORY

INFINIUM LABS’ DEBUT AT CES IS A DAMP SQUIB

Few machines have been so mired in controversy as Infinium Labs’ Phantom. Every mention of the console has been accompanied by musings on whether the machine actually exists, the most recent example being the Phantom’s bizarre appearance at January’s Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas.

After cancellations at previous shows, Infinium finally unveiled the machine, only to reveal a prototype that wasn’t even plugged in. A list of publishers and games was announced, but despite the inclusion of a few newer titles like *Terminator 3: Rise Of The Machines*, most games took the guise of edutainment software or were extremely old (*Dino Crisis*, anyone?). There was support from Capcom, Atari, Take 2 and Ubisoft, but none of the games were exactly triple-A titles, and the release list was quickly pulled from Infinium Labs’ website within hours of the unveiling.

Just when it looked like the Phantom was nothing more than ‘vapourware’, however, Infinium surprised sceptics by revealing that Kevin Bachus is the company’s new president and chief operating officer. Bachus had been one of the key figures of the Xbox’s launch, before co-founding the recently disbanded Capital Entertainment Group. We’re now eagerly awaiting this year’s E3 where the Phantom is expected to be unveiled in all its glory. Properly this time…





FORMER CORE MEN REVEAL THEIR NEW COMPANY

WHAT GOES AROUND...

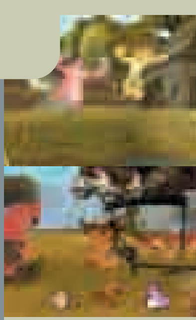
The men who established Core Design and helped 'discover' Lara Croft have set up a new development company. Core co-founders Jeremy Heath-Smith and Adrian Smith's Derby-based Circle Studio is already working on two titles for the Xbox and PlayStation2, as well as preparing to work on Xbox 2 and PlayStation3.

"It's very exciting to be standing on our own two feet again and we're fortunate to be in a position that allows us to develop our prototypes fully, whilst exploring the best route or partnership for publishing," said development director Smith.

The pair should be able to hit the ground running as their staff includes 35 former employees of Core Design – almost half of Core's payroll. "Adrian and I are passionate about games and we have the experience and skills in-house to continue producing original and successful titles," said Heath-Smith. As yet, no details have been released concerning Circle's forthcoming titles, but Heath-Smith says the company is "looking forward to creating something – or someone – new".

Re-creating the success of Lara Croft – one of the most distinctive characters in gaming history – won't be easy. Smith and Heath-Smith co-created the pneumatic heroine with Toby Gard and the success of the first *Tomb Raider* game in 1996 was a boost for Core Design. Sadly, as the sequel numbers got higher the quality of the games declined, and Core's undoing was the long-delayed and disappointing *Tomb Raider: Angel Of Darkness*. Following the game's panning, publisher Eidos gave the licence to Crystal Dynamics, prompting Heath-Smith to resign from the positions he held at Core and Eidos.

How these developments will affect Core remains to be seen, but we can't help feeling rather pessimistic. It's fair to say that Core's upcoming titles like *Project Eden* and *Herdy Gerdy* hardly look like they'll be setting the world alight. Nevertheless, Smith and Heath-Smith are looking towards the future and are no doubt hoping to repeat the success they had with their phenomenal *Tomb Raider* franchise.



Can *Herdy Gerdy* revive Core Design's fortunes?

LARA'S TIMELINE

She might be young in gaming terms, but Lara's definitely had a good run. Let's just hope that Crystal Dynamics is able to get the franchise back on track.

- Tomb Raider PlayStation [1996]
- Tomb Raider II: Dagger Of Xian PlayStation [1997]
- Tomb Raider III: Adventures Of Lara Croft PlayStation [1998]
- Tomb Raider: The Last Revelation Dreamcast [2000]
- Tomb Raider: Chronicles Dreamcast [2000]
- Tomb Raider Game Boy Color [2000]
- Tomb Raider: Curse Of The Sword Game Boy Color [2001]
- Tomb Raider: The Prophecy Game Boy Advance [2002]
- Tomb Raider: The Angel Of Darkness PlayStation2 [2003]
- Tomb Raider: The Osiris Codex Mobile [2003]
- Tomb Raider N-Gage [2003]

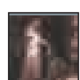


Poor Lara – more sequels means less success.



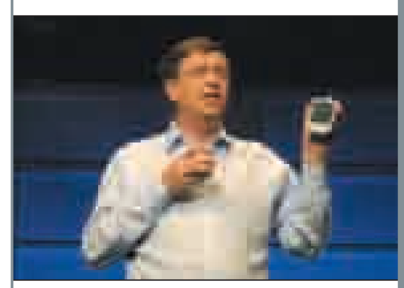
Data Stream

BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



ARISE, SIR BILL

He's already the world's richest man, and as head of Microsoft has become one of the most powerful, but Bill Gates' CV recently became even more impressive as he has been granted an honorary knighthood by the Queen. While obviously a US citizen and therefore not eligible to adopt the title of 'Sir', Gates will join fellow Americans Steven Spielberg and Rudi Giuliani in adding the letters KBE to the end of his name. Along with services to enterprise in the UK, Gates' sizeable donations to good causes also helped earn him the rare accolade.





UP TO SPEED

Sony is keeping its word that the compromises made to get its PSX on the shelves in Japan before Christmas would only temporarily leave consumers without several of the key features promised in the original specs. The first free software update is now available, enabling the PSX to support MP3 files and boosting DVD recording speed, with a second disk that will finally permit online gaming on the way. A European release date is still unconfirmed, but we can expect to receive the full complement of features as standard by that time.



IT'S NINTENDO'S TURN TO GET ITS CONSOLE EMULATED

GAMECUBE GOES PC

The beleaguered GameCube has been struck another blow, as news emerges that the machine has been emulated. PC owners will now be able to enjoy some Nintendo gaming action simply by downloading a file from the internet.

Dubbed Dolphin, the emulator appeared in the middle of January and is already running several games. *Super Mario Sunshine*, *The Wind Waker*, *Ikaruga* and *Bust-A-Move 3000* are among the titles that have been successfully emulated, with the promise of more on the way. However, the system has suffered teething problems and is far from perfect. As the GameCube is so powerful, PC gamers will need a high-end computer and a Radeon 9000+ graphics card before Dolphin will run. Even then, most games only run at three to seven frames per second.

Considering the length of time it took before Nintendo's N64 was emulated, the GameCube has fallen relatively quickly. Of course, with its notoriously high security the Cube has long been a platform for programmers and hackers to test their skills, so it was perhaps inevitable that this would happen. This news will not be greeted favourably by Nintendo, though the company was unavailable for comment at the time of going to press. However, we doubt that Dolphin will affect sales of the Cube.



Mario on a PC? What'sa going on ?

gamesTM THE TOP FIVE

WORDS THAT SHOULD BE BANNED FROM GAME TITLES

No.5 ADVANCE

We know it's a GBA game, guys

No.4 UNDERGROUND

No tubes, no pipes? Not convinced…

No.3 UNLEASHED

Was it ever tied up in the first place?

No.2 EXTREME

As believable as something 'wacky'

No.1 VEXX

The most terrifying word in gaming



ITALIAN COURT SAYS CONSOLE CHIPPING IS NOT ILLEGAL

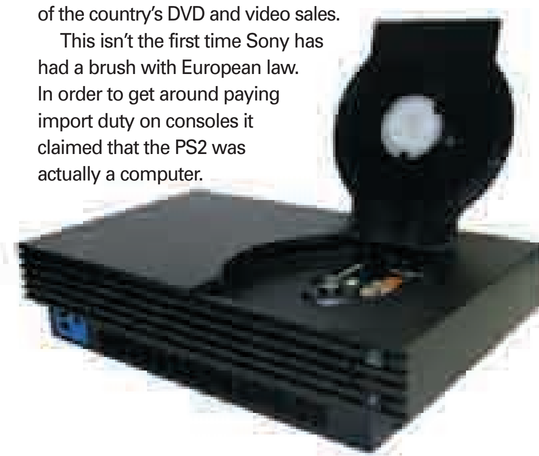
THE MOD SQUAD

Judges in Italy have ruled that PlayStation2 mod chips are not illegal. The decision came after a raid on 31 December last year in which chipped PS2s were seized. The court declared that the raid itself was illegal and that Sony was violating the Italian civil code by banning modifications to its machines.

Stating that PS2 chipping is undertaken to "avoid monopolistic positions and improve the possibilities for use of the PlayStation2", the judges said that it was up to the console's owner to "use it as they see fit". The court likened the regional specificity of PS2 software to "Fiat marketing its cars while banning them from being driven by non-European citizens".

Sony is bound to be unhappy with this ruling as it is well known for taking action against software pirates and people who try to illegally modify its machines. Other console manufacturers will also be worried by this news as it may pave the way for further chipping activities, though this will depend on the number of countries that adopt Italy's liberal stance. Piracy is rife in Italy, with bootleg DVDs accounting for 30 per cent of the country's DVD and video sales.

This isn't the first time Sony has had a brush with European law. In order to get around paying import duty on consoles it claimed that the PS2 was actually a computer.



Data Stream
BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



RETURN OF THE MC

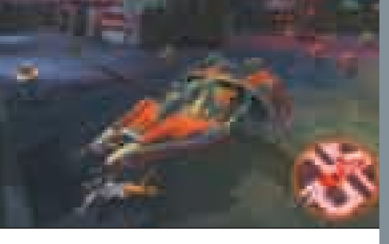
Following the success of last year's Edinburgh International Games Festival, the event will be held again this August. With an expanded programme, this year's show should establish EIGF as a key date on the industry calendar. "EIGF 2003 was an incredible success," said the head of this year's organising committee, Greg Ingham. "However, we know there's much more we can do and in 2004 we're even more keen to use EIGF to demonstrate to the world that videogames are an important part of today's culture."

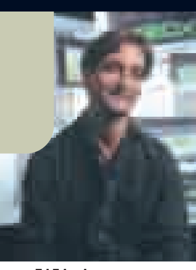




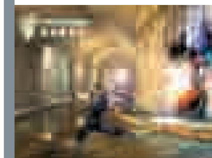
READY TO GO

Didier Malenfant, previously of Naughty Dog and a key player in the *Jak & Daxter* series, has joined former Blizzard staff Ru Weerasuriya and Andrea Pessino to form new studio Ready At Dawn. Although their first project is still very much under wraps, the trio's expertise has already attracted plenty of interest from publishers. "The interest we've already generated in the industry has been incredible," revealed Pessino, "and goes to show that, at the end of the day, it's still about the individuals behind the games and their ability to deliver and turn solid concepts into successful titles."

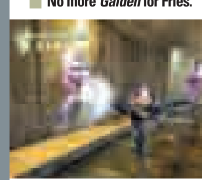


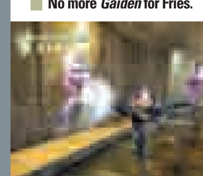


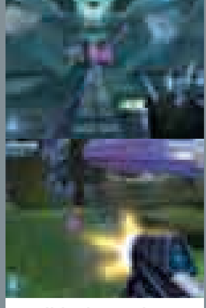
Ed Fries is yet to announce his next move.



No more *Gaiden* for Fries.







Halo – the game that launched a million Xboxes.



SEPARATED AT BIRTH

games™ tracks down those videogame lookalikes

One is Rockstar's embittered hard man Max Payne, the other is *Coronation Street*'s killer Richard Hillman. Are they by any chance related?



FRIES TO GO

ED FRIES CALLS IT A DAY AT MICROSOFT

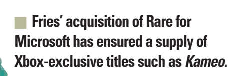
Microsoft Game Studios boss Ed Fries has resigned from the company after 18 years of service. Since the launch of the Xbox in 2001 Fries had constantly pushed for support of the console and acquired some of the most popular developers in the business. The likes of Bungie Studios, Bizarre Creations and Rare are now all making titles exclusively for Microsoft's machine.

The PC market has also benefited from Fries' magic touch. Titles such as *Flight Simulator*, *Rise Of Nations* and *Age Of Empires* have all enjoyed critical and commercial acclaim and are typical examples of the type of games formed under Fries' tutelage. The news of his sudden departure was unveiled in a letter by chief Xbox officer Robbie Bach. "It is with regret that I inform you that I have reluctantly accepted Ed's resignation," the letter explained. "Although we'll miss Ed, we hope he takes this opportunity to sit back, relax and allow himself a moment to relish the contribution he's made to the company and the industry."

Despite Fries' seemingly abrupt exit, Bach has nothing but praise for him, although many felt Fries had under-performed – some consider the acquisition of Rare has yielded disappointing results.

The only gripe we have with Fries' tenure is the constant delay of titles like *Ninja Gaiden*, *Halo 2* and *Kameo: Elements Of Power* (all three were originally due by the end of 2003). This is a small quibble, however, and in the meantime we'll be eagerly looking forward to see what Fries does next.

This isn't the only high-profile departure that Microsoft has had to face during the Xbox's lifespan. Seamus Blackley, one of Xbox's co-creators, left Microsoft in early 2002 and formed the Capital Entertainment Group (only to see it close late last year), while Kevin Bachus, who was also a major force behind the Xbox's launch, now works for Infinium Labs (see page 11).



Fries' acquisition of Rare for Microsoft has ensured a supply of Xbox-exclusive titles such as *Kameo*.



SUPER SOFTWARE

MARVEL REVEALS A NEW GAMES DIVISION

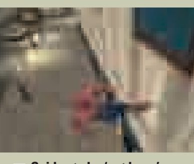
After the amount of cinematic interest in Marvel's many superheroes, it's unsurprising that the comic-book publisher has announced a new division that will concentrate on the development of licensed superhero videogames. With Spider-Man, Daredevil and the X-Men on board, the company has a great portfolio of characters to work with.

"The multi-billion-dollar videogame industry continues to be a significant revenue opportunity for Marvel and a high-profile vehicle to build the awareness of Marvel's brands," said Marvel's publishing president, Gui Karyo. Ames Kirshen has been appointed the new manager of game development and has previously worked with DC Comics and Warner Bros on their Batman and Superman licences. "Our appointment of Ames allows us to increase the quality, playability and marketing power of this influential product category, fuelling higher licensing income and consumer exposure for Marvel," said Karyo.

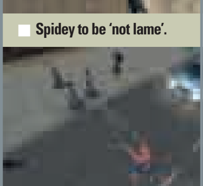
Let's just hope the bit about 'quality and playability' is true; after all, comic-book and film licences rarely turn out to be little more than average games. With the likes of *The Punisher* from THQ and new *X-Men* and *Spider-Man* sequels from Activision on the way, shoddy licences could become a thing of the past. We're not going to hold our superhuman breath, though.



X-Men games to improve.



Spidey to be 'not lame'.



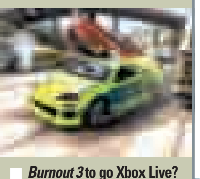
EA EXPANDS

PUBLISHER TEAMS UP WITH CRITERION AND FREE RADICAL

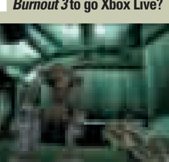
Software powerhouse Electronic Arts is to publish the latest titles from Criterion and Free Radical. *Burnout 3* and *TimeSplitters 3* will be the sequels to the critically acclaimed *Burnout 2: Point Of Impact* (published by Acclaim) and *TimeSplitters 2* (from Eidos). Both previous titles failed to set the charts alight so it's no surprise that the developers are looking to harness EA's marketing muscle.

Although *TimeSplitters 3* is not due to arrive until 2005, *Burnout 3* is already slated for a summer release on all three major formats. Industry insiders are hinting that the Xbox version will be the first EA title to incorporate Xbox Live. Following talks between the publisher and Microsoft the likelihood of EA beginning to incorporate Live elements in its games is looking more promising. Rumours of an Xbox conversion of *Battlefield 1942* add more weight to this speculation.

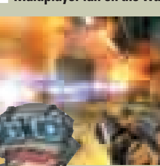
Little has been revealed about *TimeSplitters 3*, but Free Radical chairman Steve Ellis is confident that working with EA will prove fruitful. "Choosing EA Partners as our publishing partner represents a big breakthrough for Free Radical," he said. "We're already working hard on the next game and hope that, with the help of EA Partners, we can reach many new players all over the world." Now all we need is *Harry Potter Quidditch 2005* and our lives will be complete…

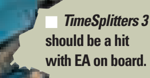


Burnout 3 to go Xbox Live?



Multiplayer fun on the way.





TimeSplitters 3 should be a hit with EA on board.



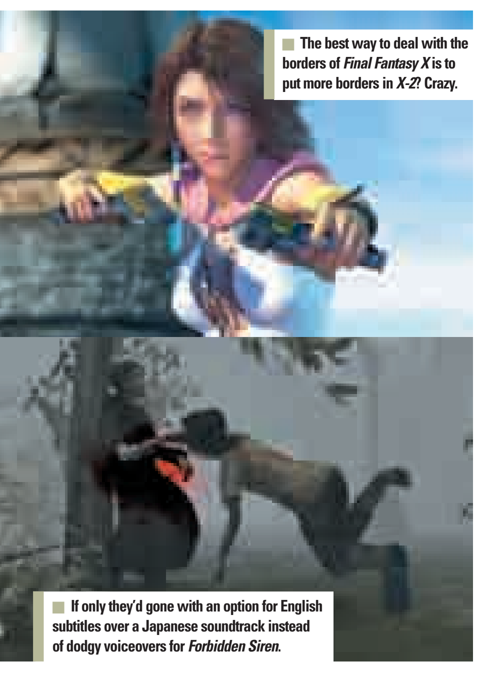
GAMES ROOM 101

THE NEGATIVE SIDE OF VIDEOGAMING

NO.16: GOING DOWN THE LOCAL

It stands to reason that games made for specific markets need to be localised before they can be sold elsewhere – be it something as simple as translating the text into another language to a complete change in the game's structure. Unfortunately, such localisation often makes us angry. Some games, for instance, require more work than others; *Animal Crossing* apparently has over five times more text in it than your average RPG. Factor in Nintendo's insistence on translating all European releases into multiple languages and we won't see it for ages.

Of course, when language localisation is done badly it can do a quality game serious damage – something that's proved by Sony's tampering with *Forbidden Siren*. It's a horror game set in Japan, so why does everyone have badly acted vaguely Cockney accents? Atmosphere makes or breaks a survival horror game, so to destroy any that *Siren* had with bad voiceover tracks is unforgivable. Still, at least the game's been optimised properly for PAL consoles – something that can't be said about *Final Fantasy X-2*. No 60Hz mode, as well as borders on the sides *and* the top and bottom of the picture? That's the kind of behaviour that gets angry mobs going.



The best way to deal with the borders of *Final Fantasy X* is to put more borders in *X-2*? Crazy.

If only they'd gone with an option for English subtitles over a Japanese soundtrack instead of dodgy voiceovers for *Forbidden Siren*.

Data Stream

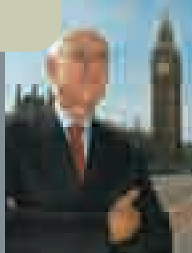
BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



MALICE EVOLVED

Acclaimed British developer Argonaut has agreed publishing deals for forthcoming titles *Malice* and *Powerdrome* with Evolved Games, announcing that PS2 and Xbox versions of both games should be on the shelves by summer. The team behind SNES classic *Starfox* and recent cartoon platformer *I-Ninja* is hoping *Malice* will enjoy the same level of success pundits had predicted for the game back in 2001, when it was scheduled as an Xbox launch title. The remake of futuristic racer *Powerdrome* is bound to intrigue fans of the original Amiga/Atari ST version.





ELSPA's director general, Roger Bennett.

ELSPA STEPS UP FIGHT

THE WAR AGAINST PIRACY GOES TO THE NEXT LEVEL

With piracy continuing to trouble the games industry, the Entertainment and Leisure Software Publishers' Association (ELSPA) has held talks with the Department of Culture, Media and Sport and the Department of Trade and Industry. In what ELSPA hopes will be the first of several meetings, plans were made to set up an effective way of combating piracy and counterfeiting in the UK.

"It was a very positive meeting where a range of issues were discussed," said ELSPA's director general, Roger Bennett. "I was encouraged by the government's desire to work with the industry in dealing with them, in particular the one of piracy. Together we aim to look at the enforcement resources, as well as how to generate public awareness of the damage this crime inflicts on society."

Piracy is an issue that has hounded consoles and computers for years, but Bennett is hoping that these meetings will be able to turn the problem around. "The emphasis will be on cure rather than prevention," he explains. "These meetings offer us, as well as other industry sectors, the opportunity to not only discuss the more specific problems we suffer, but also to provide senior government members with sufficient information to enable them to make informed judgements on how they can tackle such problems."

Following police anti-piracy raids at Christmas and the theft of *Half-Life 2* code, the support of the government could help crack down on counterfeit software.



Meaningless waffle from the industry

THIS MONTH Marketing guru Kevin Bachus explains his reluctance to talk about the Phantom console since joining Infinium Labs

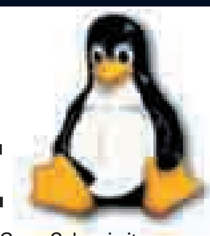
"I'm not the kind of guy who likes to come to the table without answers to every question and, unfortunately, we're not there yet"

games™ says: No, you're not, although that might be because all the important info – like the machine specs, a price or any kind of demo – doesn't even exist. Never mind coming to the table, Kevin, you might want to make a reservation first…

MORE FROM MR CHIPS NEXT MONTH!

GAMECUBE MAY GET LINUX

CODERS TO CRACK CUBE



Now that the Xbox has fallen to Linux-obsessed programmers, it's been revealed that Nintendo's GameCube has become their next target. Sony's PlayStation2 already has a sanctioned version of Linux up and running, so it's hardly surprising that the Cube is next in line.

Nintendo's machine is notoriously difficult to hack, but it appears that the programmers are using a well-known bug found in *Phantasy Star Online* that enables coders to load programs onto the GameCube via its broadband adaptor. This has already been used to run pirate games on the machine, so it's only a matter of time before the console is hacked.

Once the Cube is Linux-compatible, gamers will be able to browse the internet as well as watch movies and listen to music. With the console lacking the Xbox's hard drive, however, it will have to be connected to a local network, so there's no need to start erasing those precious memory cards.



BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



MIKEROWESOFT XBOX

Teenager Mike Rowe, whose website mikerowesoft.com rose to fame after Microsoft threatened the 17-year-old with legal action for trademark infringement, has reached an out-of-court settlement with the software giant. Microsoft had initially offered to reimburse the $10 Rowe paid for the domain name, while the student sought a figure closer to $10,000. But a deal involving an Xbox and other Microsoft freebies was eventually agreed upon. Since the news broke, web addresses mikerowesoft.co.uk, .net and .tv were quickly snapped up.



VODAFONE LIVE MOST DOWNLOADED

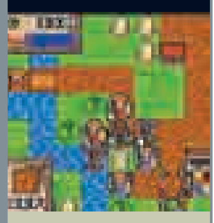
1. LOTR: Return Of The King
2. Tomb Raider: The Quest For Cinnabar (IOMO)
3. Tiger Woods PGA Tour Golf (IOMO)
4. Tetris
5. Pub Pool (IOMO)
6. Tomb Raider: The Osiris Codex (IOMO)
7. FIFA Football 2004
8. Pac-Man
9. Monopoly (IOMO)
10. Tony Hawk's Underground

Week ending 09/01/04

Mobile game of the month

ANCIENT EMPIRES

We've seen how well tactical RPGs are suited to handheld gaming, with the likes of *Advance Wars* on the GBA, so it's logical for the genre to bring new gameplay depth to the mobile phone. Turn-based epic *Ancient Empires* might not match its GBA peers, but the map-based movement and close-up split-screen battles will have you hooked.





UK DEVELOPER DOMINATES CHART

THE EA OF MOBILE GAMES

Leading UK mobile phone game developer IOMO notched up another prestigious coup in early January when the top ten most downloaded games from the Vodafone Live service featured no fewer than five pieces of its handiwork (see left). "We were delighted to find our titles featured so often in the latest Vodafone chart," said John Chasey, managing director of the award-winning studio. "As a company we have been lucky enough to work with many of the leading mobile games publishers in the world, with some very well-known brands and licences."

IOMO has developed over 30 mobile-phone games and there are more in the pipeline. And at a time when an increasing number of companies are joining the mobile gaming party, for one developer to hog half of the top ten is quite an achievement.

ON THE RIGHT TRAC?

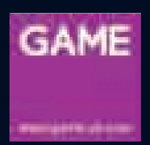
TIGER'S ALL-INCLUSIVE MOBILE OUT THIS YEAR

The biggest threat to the N-Gage's future since its first week sales figures, Tiger Telematics' Gametrac, made its first public appearance at this year's Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas. Proudly adorning the Microsoft stand, the high-tech mobile entertainment system will use the familiar Windows CE.NET operating system to support its multitude of functions.

Selling itself as the most comprehensive compilation of cutting-edge mobile phone technology to date, the Gametrac is a competent gaming device but also sports a high-resolution digital camera, allows playback of feature-length movies, and makes use of Tiger's latest GPS technology for both gaming and more practical purposes.

Yet despite being a multifunctional machine, the design and processing capabilities of the miniature marvel look to create an intriguingly high-quality gaming experience. With a standalone gamepad that includes shoulder buttons; a GBA-dwarfing 2.8-inch screen; and a 400MHz processor, the multifunctional Gametrac could give the N-Gage a serious headache when it's released later this year.

We've teamed up with those fine people at GAME to offer you a £3 discount voucher, thus ensuring your hard-earned cash will stretch just that little bit further. And it's not like there aren't plenty of games out there waiting to be bought. Get the scissors out now.



Subject to the terms and conditions listed below:
1. Offer only valid on redemption of this voucher in store, which cannot be used in conjunction with any other offer or voucher.
2. Voucher is redeemable at any GAME store in the UK and Eire.
3. This voucher has a cash value of 0.00001p and is non-recoverable.
4. This voucher is redeemable against software and accessories priced £29.99 (€44.99) or more only, excludes hardware.
5. Only one voucher may be used per product and transaction.
6. This voucher cannot be redeemed against a pre-owned purchase.
7. This offer may be withdrawn at any time without prior notice.
8. In Eire, €4 off a spend of €44.99 or more.
9. Voucher valid until 24 March 2004.

£3 OFF VOUCHER

5034410101403

Any game priced £29.99 or more

"IF AN EXCEEDINGLY FUNCTIONAL SPOON COULD BE REGARDED AS AN ART FORM, THEN ALL VIDEOGAMES MAY HAVE THE RIGHT TO BE CLASSIFIED AS AN ART FORM"

MASANORI TAKEUCHI, PRODUCER, FROM SOFTWARE

FROM SOFTWARE

MASANORI TAKEUCHI

Considering the limited number of Xbox-exclusive titles available, it's interesting to see that From Software has really stuck its neck out and produced multiple titles that are unique to Microsoft's console. One of its more controversial titles, not only in terms of its widely disparate review scores but also in its commercial success, is hack-and-slash adventure *Otogi*. The game did particularly well in its native Japan, a fact which its producer and creator, Masanori Takeuchi, attributes to the esoteric lead character, Raiko. "People abroad may not know of Minamoto no Yorimitsu [a legendary Japanese warrior], but in Japan, if you are educated, I would say Yorimitsu is a fairly well-known historical figure, not to mention that the world of the samurai has a fairly worldwide appeal. We also considered Xbox to be targeting the educated and, hence, they wouldn't be ignorant of the historical reference."

With his eagerness to target 'educated' gamers, it's no surprise to learn that Takeuchi-san is a rather cultured individual and he views gaming with a particularly highbrow attitude. "I am interested in games for adults; high-grade, advanced games for what I call a truly mature adult," he says. "These games are like fine wine or brandy that is rich in flavours. Unfortunately, I don't think there is much demand for this type of game in Japan, but if I could produce a game like this, it would be great."

Yes, it would be great. But would it be easy? And would it be possible to reconcile the worlds of gaming and art? Takeuchi-san seems to think so. "There are so many different types of videogames available now. Among them, some could be considered as an art form. However, in terms of business, these games would be unlikely to succeed, I think. As the capability of hardware improves, the freer the expression becomes. I think this kind of development in technology is good for game creators… Having said that, the more expressive the media becomes, creators need to be more precise in what they want to express. So if an exceedingly functional spoon could be regarded as an art form, then all videogames may also have the right to be classified as an art form."

Quite. Yet despite his clear-cut thoughts on gaming, Takeuchi-san didn't intend to end up working with videogames. "It was purely a coincidence I got into the games industry," he says. "A friend invited me actually. I spent time playing videogames as everyone else did in my generation; it is one of the things that symbolises my generation, I think. However, I had never thought about working for the videogame industry at all. As I was studying graphic design and film at university, I was convinced that I would end up working within these fields."

Takeuchi-san has been at From Software for about five years now, and in this short time has already built up an impressive collection of titles to his name, beginning with *Shadow Tower* for the PlayStation. "This game really means something to me, because if I had not been involved in this I would never have been making games at all," he explains. As a producer, he has been responsible for seven games (*Otogi: Hyakki Toubatsu Emaki* being the seventh); the total rises to ten if you count the titles with which he was only partially involved. "When I think about all this I surprise myself at the quick pace that I am making games," Takeuchi-san says. And he's not wrong – *Otogi: Hyakki Toubatsu Emaki* has taken just ten months to produce.

Yet despite this frenetic pace of development, Takeuchi-san is often uncertain of what he wants his games to be. "I am always unsure of what I want to make before I start making something. When I finish producing something, or even after a year of completing a game, then I can make sense of what I wanted to do in retrospect." However, from the raft of improvements and expansions that have been lavished upon *Otogi*'s sequel (the title of which roughly means "a tale of combating a hundred demons") it seems like Takeuchi-san had a pretty clear idea of what he wanted to achieve. Raiko is joined by five other playable characters, including Abe no Haruki ("a hero who existed in Japanese history" Takeuchi-san explains), who will fight their way through 29 levels. And let's not forget the cut-scenes… "The game has about three hours of in-game cut-scenes that employ extensive motion capture," Takeuchi-san says. "I hope that all this will make the game more exciting."

Otogi: Hyakki Toubatsu Emaki is out now in Japan and is previewed on page 60.



FINE WINES AND FUNCTIONAL SPOONS ARE THE TENETS OF GAMES DESIGN FOR MASANORI TAKEUCHI. LUCKILY, HE'S KIND ENOUGH TO EXPLAIN WHY…



ADSL filters, ISPs and routers probably don't mean much to the majority of console gamers, and it's no surprise because for nearly ten years the only way to experience online gaming was on your PC. SEGA's attempt to kick-start the online console revolution with the Dreamcast failed to captivate gamers. But though it seemed that online console gaming would never take off, the availability of broadband has seen PS2 and Xbox owners embrace online gaming at an incredible rate. With Xbox Live and PS2 Online growing in popularity, broadband providers have readied themselves with a wealth of services, prices and options to tempt more gamers into the online fold. With that in mind, **games™** tried to find out which companies offer the best deals and whether they know their onions when it comes to broadband gaming.

WITH THE RISE OF BROADBAND THERE'S NEVER BEEN A BETTER TIME TO GO GAMING ONLINE. BUT WITH A WEALTH OF BROADBAND PROVIDERS ALL AFTER YOUR CASH, WHICH ONE IS BEST FOR YOU?

PIPE DREAMS

THE PROVIDERS

NTL

- PHONE: 0800 183 0123 (0800 123 6666 broadband console gaming line)
- WEBSITE: www.ntlhome.com
- BROADBAND SPEEDS: 150K (£17.99 p/m), 600K (£24.99 p/m), 1Mb (£34.99 p/m)
- INSTALLATION: Free until the end of March (self-installation only). Normally £75, or £50 for existing customers
- FORMATS: PC, Xbox, PS2
- BUNDLES: Can be supplied with TV and phone services
- TECH SUPPORT: Online help, phone line (8am-midnight, local rate)
- EXTRAS: 55Mb webspace, 15 email addresses, cable modem rental included in monthly fee. Installation CD (for cable modem), Ethernet cable with adapter (for digital set-top box). Xbox Live Starter Kit – £49.99 (RRP £69.99)

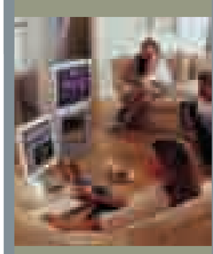
NTL can bring you the marvel of broadband via a standalone cable modem or through your set-top box if the company supplies your cable or digital TV. The firm seems to be committed to gaming – its website has a dedicated gaming section that sells software and consoles at a discount. It was quick to support Xbox Live and it seems to have readied itself for the expected explosion in online console gaming and has a wealth of packages to suit all needs.

NTL claims to be the UK's number-one broadband supplier, and when we spoke to NTL staff they seemed very knowledgeable about PS2 Online and the Xbox Live Starter Pack, which they repeatedly pushed as they felt it was great value compared to buying it on the high street. For mid-range broadband, NTL is best. It offers 600k (as opposed to the standard 512k) which, in our experience, is more than enough to enjoy lag-free gaming. In the months that we have used it, we found the service to be pretty stable and reliable. But don't opt for the extra IP address that NTL seems determined to foist upon gamers for an extra £5 per month, as you don't need it.

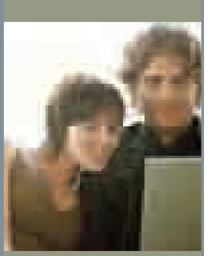
WHAT YOU THINK

"Used them for my PS2 online gaming and they were great. They close their connections sometimes for maintenance but only for a couple of hours." Metalgearrex, totalgames.net

VERDICT
GOOD VALUE AND PRETTY RELIABLE. WHATEVER YOUR GAMING NEEDS, NTL SEEMS TO HAVE THEM COVERED



"NTL'S WEBSITE HAS A DEDICATED GAMING SECTION THAT SELLS SOFTWARE AND CONSOLES AT A DISCOUNT"



"TELEWEST BROADBAND HAS ALWAYS BEEN VERY POPULAR WITH PC AND ONLINE CONSOLE GAMERS"

Telewest

- PHONE: 0800 953 5383
- WEBSITE: www.telewest.co.uk
- BROADBAND SPEEDS: 512K (£29.99 p/m), 1Mb (£39.99), 2Mb (£54.99 p/m)
- INSTALLATION: £50
- FORMATS: PC, Xbox, PS2
- BUNDLES: Dual-connector pack for gamers (provides cabling, a hub and a second IP address) can be supplied with phone and TV services
- CUSTOMER SUPPORT: Telephone and email, 24 hours
- EXTRAS: Modem, 30Mb webspace, five email accounts (with 1Mb service)

Telewest doesn't have a great deal of coverage in the UK, but its broadband service is shaping up very nicely. We found the Telewest staff extremely helpful and quite knowledgeable about our needs. They made it clear that we would need more than just a console to go online and told us exactly what we needed to buy. Gamers seem quite well catered for and we were told of a dual-connector pack that would supply us with extra cabling, a hub and a separate IP address. There was even a Beta testing service for Xbox owners but, unfortunately, it was too late to join. Although quite keen to push Telewest's other services, the advisor was happy to just discuss broadband gaming and didn't pressure us.

The company is proud of its broadband credentials: "Telewest broadband has always been very popular with PC and online console gamers," said John Moorwood, Telewest's consumer PR manager. "I don't think people buy broadband just for gaming – other than gamers themselves – but it's certainly an application that many people discover once they have a high-speed service." Telewest's service is currently very geographically limited, but if you live in the right area it could be well worth giving them a call.

WHAT YOU THINK

"I started off with the 512k/128k service about three years ago and upgraded to the 1024/256 service about 18 months ago. Both services have been excellent." Cream, totalgames.net

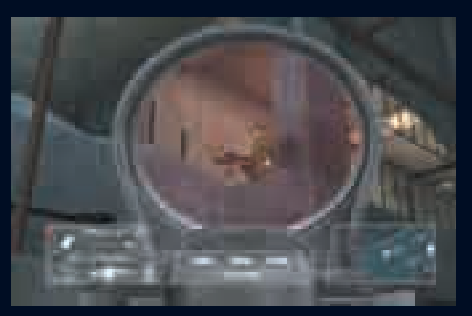
VERDICT
LIMITED COVERAGE, BUT HELPFUL STAFF AND GREAT SERVICE MEAN THAT TELEWEST IS WORTH A LOOK

TOP ONLINE GAMES THE BEST THAT BROADBAND CAN OFFER



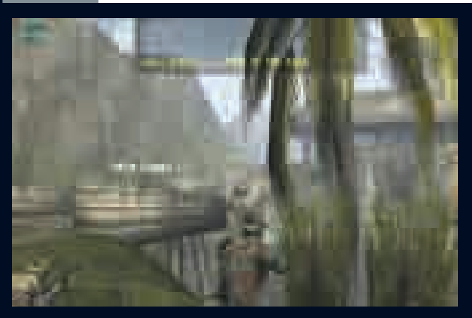
PC

Top-notch FPS titles for the PC come and go, yet *Counter-Strike* remains the world's multiplayer shooter of choice by a huge margin. The PC is also the place to be for MMORPGs, offering rich persistent game worlds such as *EVE Online* and *EverQuest*.



XBOX

Rainbow Six 3 and *Project Gotham Racing 2* are worthy favourites with Xbox Live gamers, and with the likes of *Return To Castle Wolfenstein* and XSN ace *Top Spin* there's no shortage of quality titles among Microsoft's collection of online gems.



PLAYSTATION2

SOCOM and its impending sequel are the main jewels in Sony's crown thanks to their record-breaking popularity in the US, but with *FIFA 2004* and *Need For Speed: Underground* there are plenty more reasons to get your PS2 online.

THE PROVIDERS MORE CHOICES

America Online (AOL)

- PHONE: 0800 376 4406
- WEBSITE: www.aol.co.uk
- BROADBAND SPEEDS: 512Kb (£27.99 p/m), 1Mb (£34.99)
- INSTALLATION: Free
- FORMATS: PC (Xbox and PS2 due shortly)
- BUNDLES: No – only offers internet services
- TECH SUPPORT: Phone, plus strong online tech support presence
- EXTRAS: AOL 8.0 software, seven email addresses, 140Mb web space. Free cable modem (until the end of April)

While its plentiful exclusive content and protection is fine for regular browsers, AOL is in no way the gamer's provider of choice. Ping rates and connection speeds for online PC games are, in our experience, slightly lower than you might expect from a high-speed broadband connection. A lot will really depend on how well the consoles fare online through the AOL software but this is very much an ISP first and a gaming portal second – consider the possibility of playing *PGR2* online a privilege if you're already with AOL rather than a reason to sign up.

Being the world's biggest internet provider, you'd expect AOL to have plenty of helpful staff and, from what we've seen, you'd be right. When we spoke to them, little was known about support for console gaming (the scheme is currently in Beta testing) but we've since been assured that Xbox Live and PS2 Online functionality is due over the coming months.

Due to the persistent software and services, PC gaming is a little slower than through most other providers, and while AOL's console online service has yet to be rolled out we're expecting similar results there. Great value for what you're getting but frequent gamers may want to stick to the tried and tested.

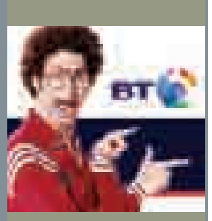
WHAT YOU THINK

"It's okay for PC gaming but I'm waiting for them to sort out Xbox Live – that's what I really want." Birdseye, totalgames.net

VERDICT

REASONABLE FOR PC GAMING, BUT NOT THE FIRST CHOICE FOR CONSOLE GAMING

"BEING THE WORLD'S BIGGEST INTERNET PROVIDER, YOU'D EXPECT AOL TO HAVE PLENTY OF HELPFUL STAFF AND, FROM WHAT WE'VE SEEN, YOU'D BE RIGHT"



"BT EMPHASISES THAT ITS SERVICE HAS BEEN SPECIFICALLY TESTED AND OPTIMISED FOR USE WITH THE PLAYSTATION2 AND XBOX"

British Telecom (BT)

- PHONE: 0800 800 060
- WEBSITE: www.bt.com
- BROADBAND SPEEDS: 512Kb (£28 p/m), 1Mb (£39 p/m)
- INSTALLATION: Free (until 31 March)
- FORMATS: PC, Xbox, PS2
- BUNDLES: No combined offers. All broadband customers must have a BT phone line.
- SUPPORT: Strong tech support presence
- EXTRAS: None with basic package, but ten email addresses, 15Mb web space and other features available with BT Yahoo! (approx. £2 extra p/m). Routing kit for console gaming: £79.99

It's hardly surprising that BT is the UK's largest broadband provider. Not only does it provide network coverage to the greatest number of households (with a target of making the service available to the entire country by 2005) but is also by default the provider of choice to its massive installed base of existing customers. Following a simple self-installation process your current BT line is upgraded to the ADSL service, and while the monthly rate is slightly pricier than its rivals, subscribers are promised the reliability and technical support synonymous with the company. BT also emphasises that its service has been specifically tested and optimised for use with the PS2 and Xbox.

We were passed on to three different advisers during our enquiry, none of whom had used the service for gaming nor were able to give us the basic advice a console gamer may require. However, none of the customers we spoke to had a bad word to say about BT's aftercare support and were generally happy with the performance of their connection.

WHAT YOU THINK

"The BT service was very user-friendly and had everything in a box delivered to my home. All I had to do was connect the line and install the modem – very simple." Nuttey, totalgames.net

VERDICT

CERTAINLY NOT THE CHEAPEST SERVICE, BUT WIDESPREAD COVERAGE MEANS IT MAY BE YOUR ONLY OPTION

SEE WHAT YOU'RE MISSING YOU REALLY OUGHT TO SIGN UP NOW, YOU KNOW…



XBOX

Apart from the excellent service itself, many Live-enabled games offer downloadable content. Thanks to the Xbox's internal hard drive, levels, skins and gaming options are all available. However, though most of these are free, charges may be introduced.



PC

The PC is the most versatile of the three broadband formats. You can download full games for free, get the latest skins or mods and even playtest games prior to release. There's also a wealth of PC gaming websites that offer forums where fans can gather.



PLAYSTATION2

As it stands, getting your PS2 online offers little extra incentive than the joy of playing against real people (and there are 1.5 million PS2 owners waiting for a game). However, Sony is planning extras from video conferencing to media downloads.

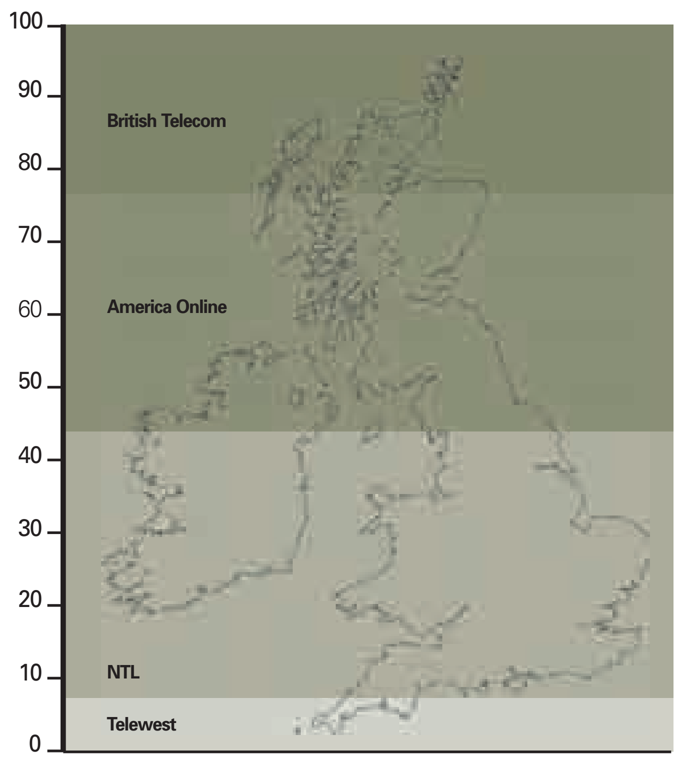
COVER STORY

BEFORE YOU PAY UP, MAKE SURE YOU'RE COVERED…

BT claims to be able to supply broadband to 90 per cent of the UK and already has over a million people using its service. NTL has the ability to pipe broadband to 8 million users, though it's worth bearing in mind that a possible merger between Telewest and NTL could see the formation of an ISP powerhouse. In a survey of totalgames.net users, NTL emerged as the favourite broadband supplier, with AOL a close second. As AOL uses the phone lines and cables of BT and NTL respectively, its potential to supply broadband is immense and it's quite competitively priced.

NETWORKING?

Like digital radio, broadband coverage is rising, with 40,000 households getting connected every week. Obviously, for those of you who have yet to get connected we would strongly advise that you shop around. There are plenty of incentives and the best place to start is each of the broadband providers' websites. Here you'll be able to find out whether the ISP supplies broadband in your area and also check out current deals. With the government having set a deadline of 2005 as the year that the UK has to have an 'extensive and competitive broadband market' you can be sure that each provider will be working hard to earn your custom.



Of the four ISPs we tested, which ones are used by totalgames.net visitors?

BROADBAND GLOSSARY

Broadband
A high-speed method of data transfer. Broadband is 'always on' so you don't have to dial up every time you go online.

ADSL
Asymmetric Digital Subscriber Line. This is a standard phone line that has been upgraded to simultaneously handle both digital data (for high-speed connections such as broadband) and analogue data (used for regular telephone connections). This set-up means you can use the phone while you're online.

ADSL Filter
When you use a telephone with ADSL, the digital information being transferred for online purposes gets picked up as distortion. An ADSL filter connects the telephone to the phone line and filters out all the digital information, resulting in distortion-free phone calls.

Ethernet
Ethernet is one method of transferring large amounts of data at high speed. Each console uses Ethernet to connect to broadband modems.

IP
Internet Protocol. The language used by computers to communicate over the internet. It 'addresses' data so routers know where to relay information.

ISP
Internet Service Provider. This is the company that supplies the internet connection to your home. BT, AOL and suchlike are all ISPs.

Router Connection
Use this if you want to share your broadband connection between your console and PC. You'll need a modem that supports an Ethernet connection.

Router
A device that handles online information and feeds it to multiple computer terminals or consoles.

Modem
A device that changes analogue signals from a standard phone line into digital data to be used by a computer, and vice versa.

KBPS
Kilobits per second – a measurement for the speed at which data transfers.

MBPS
Megabits per second – a measurement for the speed at which data transfers. One megabit = 1,204 kilobits.

USB
Universal Serial Bus. Portable storage device with its own CPU that can be used to transfer files and programs.

PROS AND CONS

UNSURE WHICH GAMING SYSTEM TO TAKE ONLINE? WE WEIGH UP THE BEST AND WORST ASPECTS OF EACH PLATFORM…

PC
COST: £Varies (most new PCs come with network cards or modems included)
SUBSCRIPTION RATES: None (certain games may charge individually)

+ Established online communities
+ Extensive mod support and upgrades
+ Online RPG heaven
- Crashes and cheating are not uncommon
- No restrictions on fees and upgrade costs
- You might 'forget' to leave the house

PlayStation2
COST: £24.99 (or £39.99 with *Twisted Metal Black Online*)
SUBSCRIPTION RATES: None (certain games may charge individually)

+ Free to play
+ Full first- and third-party support
+ Not restricted to broadband only
- Nowhere near as organised as Live
- 56k users can slow games down
- Not particularly well publicised

Xbox
COST: £39.99 (inc. headset and one year's subscription)
SUBSCRIPTION RATES: £39.99 per year (certain games may also charge individually)

+ Well-structured
+ Great use of headset
+ Regular downloadable content…
- …which is rapidly becoming charged for
- Annual fees and subscriptions
- Just one more race…

There are, of course, lots of companies that offer broadband services, not just the four we've tested. Visit a website like broadbandsuppliers.co.uk to find out about other deals that are available.
All prices were correct at time of going to press.

LETTER FROM AMERICA

WITH YOUR FRIENDLY EX-PATRIOT, THE SHAPE



"I SOON FOUND THAT WHEN SOMEONE COMES TO AMERICA FOR THE EVERYTHING YOU'VE ALREADY SEEN, AS WELL AS THINGS FROM

My brother came over to see me. When I say 'over' I don't mean over the street, I mean OVER, from Britain, to big bad America. As sparring siblings we have a long, rich gaming history together. There was much to catch up on, as you might imagine, with me being generally unavailable for deathmatches ever since leaving the bosom of Britain to emerge from the gates of Logan Airport with nothing but a suitcase full of dreams. Actually no, that was my laundry. Homeland Security blew up my suitcase of dreams when I neglected to declare them at Immigration.

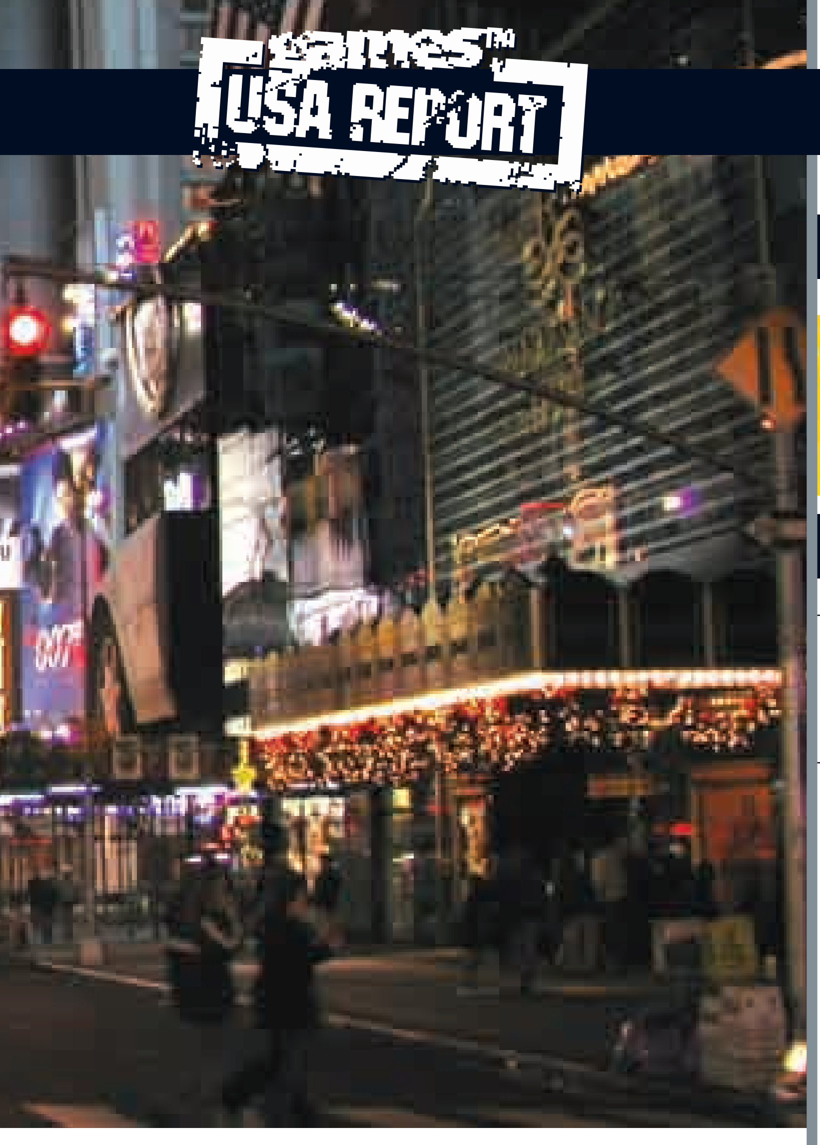
I soon found that when someone comes to the US for the first time in their life, they want to see everything you've already seen, as well as things they've spotted on exported sitcoms and movies, especially if these things are a great distance from your home.

This makes for much time aboard various forms of transport, little time settling decade-old *Need For Speed* grudges in front of the telly. In fact, I discovered, it even makes for sneaking into thumping midnight parties at $250 a head in the basement of your perplexing cyber-ranch Manhattan hotel, but that's another story, and one that I don't believe involves a single videogame. Except that the music was a bit like *Ridge Racer*.

On one such excursion from chez Shape, a looming realisation cast a dark shadow over my day: with all this to-ing and fro-ing there'd be no time for reliving extended games sessions during my bro's stay. No time for revisiting all our fond favourites from *Buggy Boy* to 'Tiny Guitars' (*Guitar Freaks*). No time for "Shoot that thing before it gets us!" and "You were adopted". It was just as this saddening thought began to wilt the flower of my excitement that sunny salvation appeared. My dear brother had brought with him a Special Lady Friend, whose name I didn't catch as he would only ever address her as 'Monkey'. She had brought along a special friend of her own: a shiny new platinum GBA SP.

Somewhere between beat-my-score bouts of *Candy's Dance Studio* on a train ride out of the Big Apple and a warm group effort to tread further into the unimaginable territory of *Wario Ware* while driving back from Foxwoods casino in the wee small hours, a fuzzy tranquillity bloomed. The memories of those happy old gaming matches are not built from the games themselves, but from a shared purpose, whether competitive or co-operative. This same atmosphere can be summoned just as easily with five ounces of portable electronics as a dedicated room chock-full of whirring, humming, bleeping, blinking, mains-shackled gear. This came as something of a surprise. A pleasant one, though.

I'll admit that I'd never taken the GBA seriously. The old Game Boy was a different story, but that was millions of years ago, when man was still only partially descended from ape and



FIRST TIME , THEY WANT TO SEE EXPORTED SITCOMS AND MOVIES"

Roseanne was still on TV. Home videogames were mainly lo-res and 2D. Playing lo-res, 2D games in greyscale wasn't really a hardship. These days the chasm between the formats is massive. On one side you've got high-resolution software on a big-screen TV, six-channel surround sound, analogue control and the option of adornments as wonderful as progressive scan and online play; on the other you've got 240x160 on a three-inch screen, tinny mono sound (sans anti-social headphones) and essentially a NES pad with all the ergonomics of a roofing tile. There's the portability issue, of course, but that always seemed to me like settling for Kelly Osbourne instead of Paganini because, hey, you've got Kelly on MiniDisc. Now I see that this was perhaps a touch unfair. GBA saved the day, and I am thankful. You still won't find me opting for *Ecks Vs Sever* over *Rainbow Six 3* if given the choice, but I've softened somewhat.

As for my brother's visit, we did squeeze in a little *Need For Speed Hot Pursuit 2*, at which I was unbeaten, I might add. In your face, bro. How inconsequential you must feel, shaping the cities of tomorrow in your architectural practice while I've spent the best part of my twenties getting slightly better at car games. Eat that.

Many thanks



MISS ABOUT BRITAIN…

Richer Sounds



LOVE ABOUT AMERICA…

Hunting caps



WANT ANY QUESTIONS ANSWERED BY THE SHAPE? THEN DROP HIM A LINE AT: theshape@comcast.net HE MIGHT LISTEN, IF YOU'RE LUCKY

AMERIKAAN

PRODUCTS, PLACES, SERVICES AND EVENTS FROM THE LAND OF THE FREE

CALZONE

It's all about delivering more cheese to the mouth of the consumer here. The calzone is a huge, heavy sack of melted provolone cheese, where the 'sack' itself is made from glazed dough. It will kill you.



US MULTIFORMAT TOP TEN

	Title	Publisher	Format
1	**Mafia**	Take 2	Multi
2	**NFL Street**	EA Sports BIG	Multi
3	**True Crime: Streets Of LA**	Activision	Multi
4	**Dragon Ball Z: Budokai 2**	Atari	PS2
5	**Tony Hawk's Underground**	Activision	Multi
6	**Mario Kart: Double Dash!!**	Nintendo	GC
7	**Manhunt**	Rockstar	PS2
8	**Madden NFL 2004**	EA Sports	Multi
9	**WWE Smackdown! Here Comes The Pain**	THQ	PS2
10	**The Simpsons: Hit And Run**	Vivendi	Multi

(Updated 4/2/04)


Mafia
True Crime

games™ JAPAN REPORT

KONGETSU*

WITH JAPANESE CORRESPONDENT TIM ROGERS

"WHY SHOULD AMERICAN VERSIONS OF GBA GAMES, WHICH THEIR THEIR DAMNEDEST AT, BE CHEAPER THAN JAPANESE ONES, RELEASED



Portable gaming is an expensive hobby in Japan. But worth it.

So I have a Game Boy Advance now – we won't get into how I got it. No, okay, we will: I live with two room-mates and one of them was arrested. He had a black Game Boy Advance and it's mine now because he's not coming back for two years. My other room-mate didn't want the GBA because it didn't have batteries in it. This problem was solved easily – just a few days earlier, my CD player had suffered a laser death so I moved the batteries from the CD player to the GBA, and there you go. The problem is that this arrested room-mate owned only one game – *Super Jinsei Game Advance*, which is simply The Game Of Life on a Game Boy cartridge and not at all fun for a guy like me who loves shooting things. He had also managed to lose the battery lid of the GBA. Curiously, I found dozens of spare battery lids at the local game shop, in all colours. I got a white lid for my black GBA and it fits like a glove. I picked it up while I was looking for new games.

It was late last year that I had to sell all my collection because of reasons we'll not get into, so the other week I figured now that I have a game system I might as well get some games. I looked up what titles might interest me, and figured that the new *Fire Emblem* and *Mario & Luigi* would be an excellent start, as would *Mother 1+2* and *SMA4: Super Mario Bros. 3*. I took a trip to a game shop, bought that battery lid and then looked confusedly over the GBA games.

"What the hell?" I asked my friend. "*Mario* for Game Boy is ¥5,480?" That's over $50. I picked up *Gotcha Force* for GameCube. "This is only ¥3,690," I pointed out, "so what's the deal?". My friend shrugged. "Game Boy games are getting popular these days, I guess," she said. That's no reason to make them more expensive, is it? "Maybe, maybe not," my friend said. She wasn't in an argumentative mood. I was. I ended up arguing to myself. Isn't it usually taken for granted that portable games are inferior to games you play at home? Games you play at home, to the Japanese, are sacred, beneath-blanket, lights-out experiences. Game Boy games are things to do on the train. Right?

So it was that I ended up importing my Game Boy games from America, where *Super Mario Bros. 3* and *Fire Emblem* are only $18 each. This makes so little sense it's ridiculous – why should the American versions of the games, which localisers had to work their damnedest at, be cheaper than the Japanese ones, released exactly as developed? The only answer is that there's some sort of shady price fixing going on.

My favourite internet café in Ikebukuro has a sign that reads '¥380 an hour', even though it's actually ¥250 for an hour and a half. The owner is so busy keeping the inside of his café spotless and convenient that he neglects to change the sign. Yet the sign for the internet café built directly above my favourite restaurant

TEACH YOURSELF JAPANESE

LESSON SIXTEEN: SCORING A FREE DINNER

Ne, kyou, mada tabetenai?	So, have you eaten anything today?
Anou, kyou mo, kinou mo zenzen tabetenai	Well, today, and, uh, yesterday, I haven't been eating anything.
Kane ga zenzen nakunatta na…	My money is all gone…
Saigo no hyaku-ni-juu en wa, seishinbunretsushou no tomodachi ni Koka-Koora katte agetakara.	I used my last ¥120 to buy a Coca-Cola for my schizophrenic friend.
Ne, ERAkatta jan!	Whoa, that was SO nice of you!

LOCALISERS HAD TO WORK EXACTLY AS DEVELOPED?"

reads '¥100 an hour', when inside it's actually ¥399 for the first hour, ¥679 for each additional hour, with one hour's rate being charged if you stay one minute over time. I asked my friend why this is, why they don't change the sign, why it's not against the law, and she shrugged.

"People like seeing that sign," she finally said. "It makes them feel good about going inside, so when they find the price is different, they don't mind so much, because they see how nice the place looks and figure it's worth the money."

Meanwhile, the Xbox is only ¥16,800 [£87], coming with *Halo*, *Project Gotham Racing 2*, an extra controller, a DVD kit *and* six months of free Xbox Live. The PlayStation2 is ¥19,800 (the broadband pack is ¥29,800), and all you get is a pretty Sony logo. "It makes people feel good to spend a lot of money on something, maybe," my friend added quietly, long after our conversation was over.

The moral of this rambling is that, well, Tokyo is expensive. And not just *expensive* expensive – it's expensive in a spooky spiritual way too.

Kind regards



OLD SCHOOL

Nintendo is releasing a bunch of classic Famicom games on GBA for only ¥2,000 each – that's cheap (about £10), I'd stopped expecting that of Game Boy games.

But with the Famicom's twentieth anniversary being celebrated here in Japan, I wanted a Famicom. So I tracked down some used ones. While four games can be had for less than the price of a can of Coke, the system itself is rare. I asked the owner of Friends, my favourite retro game shop in Akihabara, what was up.

It turns out that since Nintendo stopped making the system in 2003, all the in-box units have become collectors' items and all the used units, previously ¥5,800 each, have jumped to ¥7,800. If the collectors have their way the used systems will rise past the price of new ones, and then what? People wanting to play the classic game cartridges have to wait for Nintendo to release a GBA remake or pay too much for a used system.

And what are the chances of Nintendo releasing a port of Vic Tokai's *Clash At Demonhead* on GBA? If I want it, I need a used Famicom. But, says Mr Friends: "The damned things never work anyway."

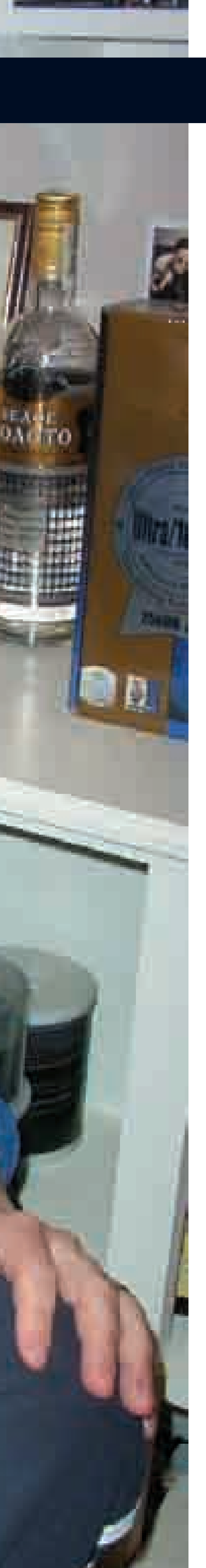
JAPANESE MULTIFORMAT TOP TEN

	Title	Publisher	Format
1	Fuun Shinsengumi	Genki	PS2
2	Phantom Brave	Nippon Ichi	PS2
3	Upset Trial 3	Capcom	GBA
4	Star Ocean 3: Director's Cut	Square Enix	PS2
5	Mega Man Battle Network 4 Tournament: Blue Moon	Capcom	GBA
6	Mega Man Battle Network 4 Tournament: Red Sun	Capcom	GBA
7	Gran Turismo 4: Prologue	Sony	PS2
8	Hot Shots Golf 4	Sony	PS2
9	Stellvia Of The Universe	Bandai	PS2
10	Mario Kart: Double Dash!!	Nintendo	GC

(Updated 2/2/04.


Phantom Brave
Star Ocean

HE'S SOLD PASCAL PROGRAMMING BOOKS AND HAS CLEANED OUT CAPTAIN SENSIBLE'S MOUSE BALL, BUT NOW DARRYL STILL IS ON A MISSION TO TELL PC GAMERS ABOUT 'THE WAY IT'S MEANT TO BE PLAYED'…





"WE TRY AND FIT SEAMLESSLY INTO THE DEVELOPER'S SCHEDULE SO THAT WE CAN ACT AS A MENTOR OR ADVISOR, OR, IF NEEDS BE, A 'Q AND A' LAB"

DARRYL STILL, HEAD OF DEVELOPER RELATIONS IN EUROPE, NVIDIA

NVIDIA

DARRYL STILL

As the PC market is once again starting to increase the graphical gap between itself and its console peers, the graphics-chip developers are milling around behind the scenes, getting ready to lend a helping hand. One of these visual wizards is Darryl Still, NVIDIA's head of developer relations in Europe, whose current task is to ensure that NVIDIA's 'The Way It's Meant To Be Played' campaign is a success. In the past he's made the Atari ST a hit in Europe – not bad for a man who once traded his Spectrum for an Oric ("I thought it was the next big thing") – so can his mission to bring high-quality graphics to PCs succeed?

"[The campaign] been very successful so far," says Still. "Our core objective is to try and make the PC games-buying experience as simple as it is for home console owners. [PC gamers will] see a game they fancy, pick up the box, check at a glance that it will work once they get home and it does." It's an admirable aim, and the process has seen NVIDIA working with developers, publishers and hardware suppliers to ensure that, first of all, PC gamers know that they've got NVIDIA graphics technology in their computers, and that games with the 'The Way It's Meant To Be Played' logo on them will work with their machine.

Of course, there's more to NVIDIA's new campaign than simply making sure that the remaining 25 per cent of non-NVIDIA-based software carries that prestigious logo. Part of the remit of Still and his team is to work closely with various developers to ensure that everything runs smoothly. "Anybody that's developing a title for the PC should be looking at getting the 'The Way It's Meant To Be Played' seal of approval on their title because 75 per cent of their consumers have NVIDIA technology in their machines," he says. "We've got over a hundred titles shipped with the logo on the box and we're hoping to achieve a similar amount in the coming year." With this in mind then, it's perhaps interesting to find out what sort of titles NVIDIA is primarily interested in, and it may not be the answer you'd think.

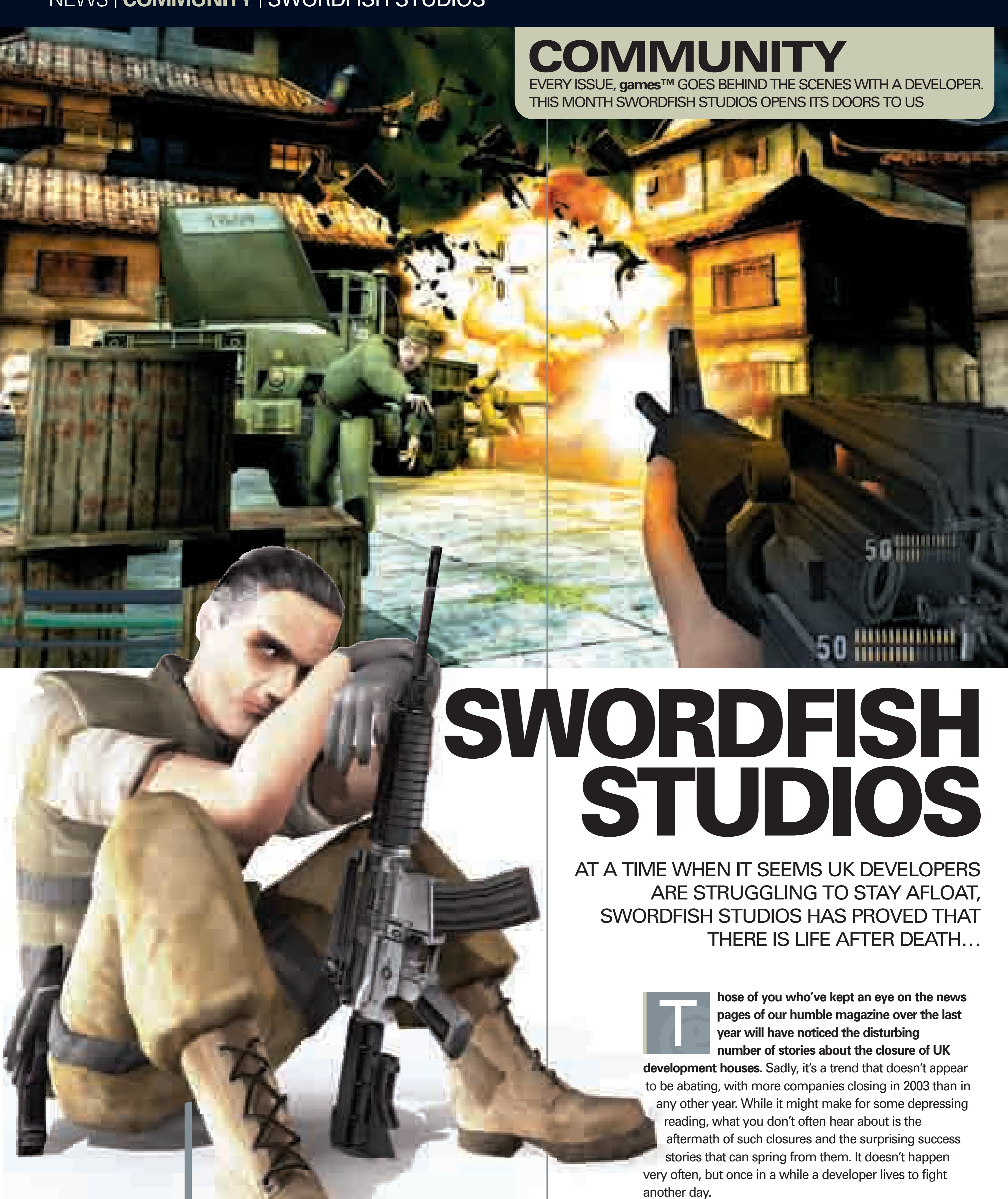
"Basically, we will work on any title that's of any worth and uses 3D technology, or 2D in the case of Sports Interactive's *Championship Manager* series," Still says. "We work with these guys [the developers] to make sure that the product looks as good as it can on our technology and, most importantly, that it works every time."

You'd expect such a close-knit relationship to give rise to a few differences of opinion, but according to Still, this never happens. "I don't think there's any ego involved in most cases," he says. "[Developers] are happy that our engineers have a very targeted focus. Their primary concerns are the graphics and the shaders and that they can offer good technical insights, like getting water effects to appear more stunning or simply squeezing out some extra frames per second. We try and fit seamlessly into the developer's schedule so that we can act as a mentor or advisor or, if needs be, a Q and A lab; basically, whatever best suits their needs." Indeed, while NVIDIA is keen to step back and let the developers get on with their work, it's quite happy to help out in more precise areas if the need arises. "We've designed several specific effects in the past – like in *Tron 2.0* – that have had a big impact within the actual game, but we never forget that we're a guest in their development schedule," Still explains. "We are not the owner of the software. It's their baby and we're just there to help in whatever way we can."

Of course, NVIDIA's most recent campaign wouldn't have got anywhere if its ethos was to simply storm into the nearest development house and tell them exactly how they should work. Indeed, you only have to look at titles like *XIII*, *Beyond Good & Evil* and the upcoming *Painkiller* to realise that NVIDIA works best when each arm of the operation is left to do its own job. As Still explains, all projects work both ways and NVIDIA's job behind the scenes is just as important. "This is a two-way affair and we do everything we can at our end to ensure that the gaming experience is perfect for the end user. That's both ours and the developer's main goal." And with some of the world's biggest and best developers already on board, it looks like we *will* end up playing our games the way they're meant to be played…

COMMUNITY

EVERY ISSUE, games™ GOES BEHIND THE SCENES WITH A DEVELOPER. THIS MONTH SWORDFISH STUDIOS OPENS ITS DOORS TO US



SWORDFISH STUDIOS

AT A TIME WHEN IT SEEMS UK DEVELOPERS ARE STRUGGLING TO STAY AFLOAT, SWORDFISH STUDIOS HAS PROVED THAT THERE IS LIFE AFTER DEATH…

Those of you who've kept an eye on the news pages of our humble magazine over the last year will have noticed the disturbing number of stories about the closure of UK development houses. Sadly, it's a trend that doesn't appear to be abating, with more companies closing in 2003 than in any other year. While it might make for some depressing reading, what you don't often hear about is the aftermath of such closures and the surprising success stories that can spring from them. It doesn't happen very often, but once in a while a developer lives to fight another day.

Swordfish Studios – based in Birmingham – has a staff of around 40 people from very diverse backgrounds.



Being a medium-sized developer with a turbulent past, it's only to be expected that the employees of Swordfish Studios find it easy to work together.

And so it is with Swordfish Studios – a small independent studio, employing around 40 people, that was once Rage Birmingham (a subsidiary of Rage) before its parent company came crashing down. At that point, it became a mad dash to salvage a developer that was on the verge of showing exactly what it could do, although the chances of such a rescue being accomplished looked virtually non-existent. "If someone had told me 18 months ago that on this day, in 2004, we'd be an independent developer working on two high-profile titles with more in the offing, I'd have sent them to a shrink," admits Julian Widdows, development director at Swordfish. "Surviving the storm of the last 17 months has been a day-to-day challenge for everyone in the studio and I'm enormously proud of the collective achievement."

Compared to the position it was in just over a year ago, the outlook for Swordfish is remarkably rosy – numerous projects on the go, a fairly solid financial base, and employees who all know the meaning of the word 'hardship' thanks to the past 12 months. Going to work for a developer that's just managing to pull itself back up from a knockdown blow might not sound like the wisest career move, but that hasn't stopped the company from expanding its diversity since starting out on its own. "Given our location, and the occasional difficulty of persuading people to relocate to Birmingham, it's amazing the variety of backgrounds people here have," says Widdows. "We have physicists, chemists, French-language graduates, a whole range of computer graduates, telephone network engineers, a chap who races downhill mountain bikes, a guy carrying out a conversion degree in psychology, a qualified pilot… the list goes on. I think this eclectic spread is one of our strengths – we're a relatively mature bunch (if only in years, you understand) which I think shows, giving us a diverse range of life experiences to draw on. Plus, of course, the more you draw on when designing and developing games, the more varied, original and compelling the experience you create becomes."

Naturally, though, the people working at Swordfish have more to offer than just different backgrounds; desperation to save a company doesn't mean you have to employ the first person that comes along. "I think we always tend to recruit as we find the right people, rather than trying to fill seats," explains Trevor Williams, Swordfish's managing director and the man who led the fight to rescue the studio from the Rage rubble. "We're very picky and look for a certain kind of person, but aren't always looking for technical wizardry. We have quite tight teams and usually it's more important that the guys can work together well. Primarily, though, we look for people who are willing to work hard and put the effort in."

This attitude is hardly surprising given the amount of hard work and effort that's been put into bringing Swordfish Studios back from

"AT THE END OF THE DAY, DEVELOPERS LIVE AND DIE BY THE QUALITY OF THE GAMES THEY MAKE"
TREVOR WILLIAMS, SWORDFISH STUDIOS

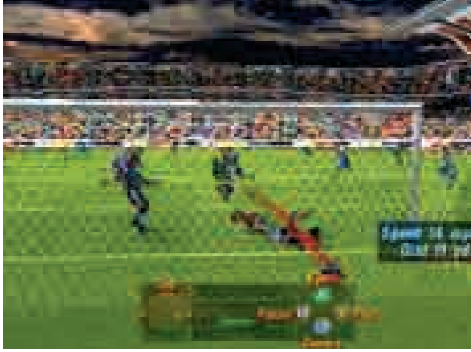
RAGE IN THE CAGE

The name might be new, but Swordfish has worked on more than a few titles over the years before it learned to stand on its own two feet (or fins, if you want to be picky)…



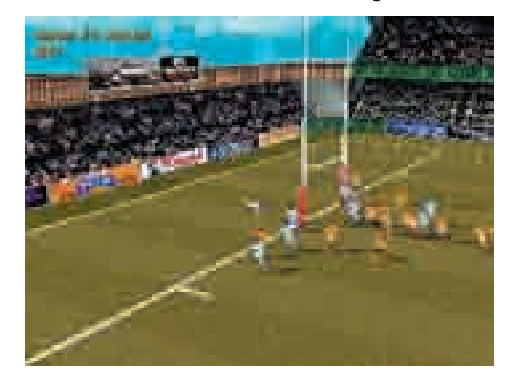
HOSTILE WATERS (PC, '01)

Swordfish's most recent release appeared on the PC to a decent reception, offering a strategy title that had more than its fair share of action moments.



UEFA STRIKER (PSONE, '99)

This was Rage's attempt to rival EA's *FIFA* brand, but the competition proved too strong against this UEFA-licensed title. That doesn't mean there won't be another in the future though…



JONAH LOMU RUGBY (PSONE, '97)

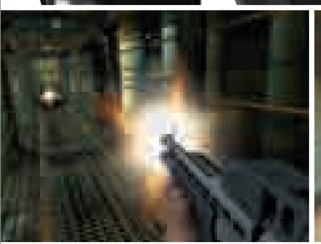
A well-received attempt at bringing the sport to the PSone and the inspiration for the upcoming *World Championship Rugby* on the PS2. Considered a leader in the rugby-game field.



***Cold Winter* has a mean and moody edge to it, as do its characters.**

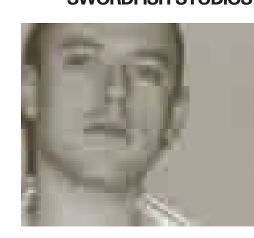
OUT IN THE COLD

First-person shooters might be ten-a-penny right now, but that hasn't stopped Swordfish trying something new with its debut title, *Cold Winter*. Though the game might look like a conventional FPS, Swordfish is hoping that some important differences will help it stand out from the crowd. "We've tried to move away from some of the more common conventions and expectations applied to the genre to build a game that's fun to play, compelling and that doesn't rely on player frustration for its core challenge," says Widdows. "I think our overriding aim to ensure that most players finish the game is the biggest difference between us and other shooters… In a market where it's accepted that the majority of players never finish the games they buy, we're trying above all else to ensure that most of our players finish the game we make. After all, we've spent all this time designing the gameplay, scripting the levels, developing the stunning graphics – we want people to experience this."





"BECAUSE WE'RE SMALL, IT'S EASIER TO NIP ANY ISSUES THAT MIGHT ARISE IN THE BUD BEFORE THEY GROW INTO SIGNIFICANT PROBLEMS"
JULIAN WIDDOWS, SWORDFISH STUDIOS



the brink – something that's been a lot tougher than some people might think. A cynic with a loose grasp of the facts might look at the formation of Swordfish some six months before the bankruptcy of parent publisher Rage and suspect some kind of insider trading, simply because of the fortuitous timing of the whole thing. Dig a little deeper, though, and the truth is rather different. "I could be cheeky and say that it was a wonderful business decision," jokes Williams when pressed on the formation of Swordfish, "but the reality is somewhat different and a lot less flattering. It was actually Rage's decision to close the studio; it was under pressure to reduce its burn rate and, unfortunately, Rage Birmingham became a casualty, so what looked like a well-timed escape plan was actually a rescue mission. We were in a pretty tight spot; it was as much firefighting and day-to-day survival than a clear, honed business plan, and when Rage finally went bust we were really in a hole. It hugely impaired our cash flow as we had no other source of income and, to be honest, it did look pretty bleak."

Of course, the fact that Swordfish could limit its outgoings through tight management and teamwork helped pull the company through; something that



1 JULIAN WIDDOWS
Development Director
In A Nutshell:
Has been at the studio for about eight years (during the Rage Birmingham and Swordfish eras) and worked on titles such as *Hostile Waters*, *Dead Ball Zone* and the Bitmap Brothers' *Z*.

2 TREVOR WILLIAMS
Managing Director
In A Nutshell: Used to design chips for firms like GEC and Marconi before joining Elite Systems as a project manager in 1990. Founded Rage Birmingham in 1994, then acquired it outright in 2002 and formed Swordfish Studios.

contradicts the current trend for all-powerful developers with several huge teams within them. "I do prefer the camaraderie of a small team with an 'everybody fights' mentality," says Williams. "You tend to get more out of people on smaller teams as people are more involved on a day-to-day basis and ultimately more accountable. The disadvantage of that, though, is it limits the opportunities that come along. Developers with larger teams attract the high-profile projects, because having significant numbers on a team reduces some of the risk. The entry bar is now higher than ever; publishers are starting to draw a line in the sand at around 12-15 people. Any company with less staff than that will have a tough time securing work."

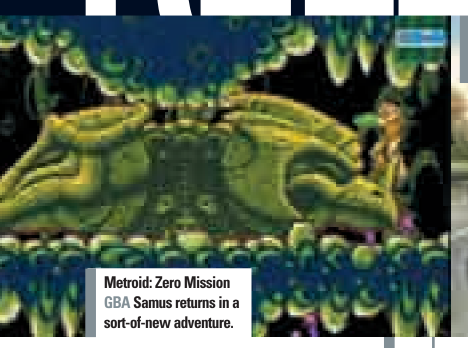
Thankfully, that hasn't proved to be much of a problem for Swordfish, despite all the past unpleasantness. The company has two games in advanced stages of development (*World Championship Rugby* and *Cold Winter*) and more unannounced titles on the way. But will the fact that Swordfish isn't a large company prevent the games from making a mark on the industry? The developer doesn't think so. "As *World Championship Rugby* is going to the first title to hit the shelves the real hope is that it will be the game that emblazons the Swordfish mark across the sky," says Widdows. "The anticipation is certainly there – since the original *Jonah Lomu* there's been a paucity of really good rugby games on any system, so we're hoping to change that. *Cold Winter*, however, is an entirely different beast; a much more serious and mainstream proposition, if you like, and one that does stand to make a huge impact when it ships." "At the end of the day," adds Williams, "*WCR* is never going to be a multi-million seller – we know that, and Acclaim knows that. But then *Cold Winter* could very easily be…"

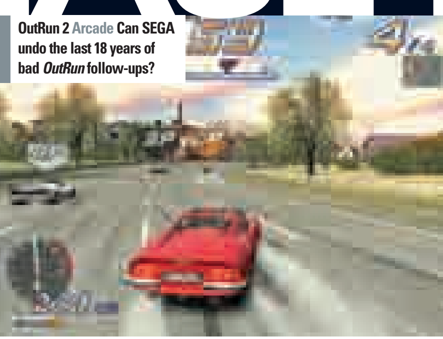
While this might sound like development hype, it's a fairly solid claim. Having played *Cold Winter*, we can certainly attest to the quality that's already there, and unless something goes wrong in the near future we suspect it might turn out to be something rather special. With so much effort going into producing the game and keeping the company afloat, there's no doubt that Swordfish deserves a big hit. And the company will be ready. "It was a bit touch and go at times," Williams says, "but we've managed to claw our way back now into some semblance of stability. I do think it does a company good to be down there though, digging in the dirt – it gives you a sense of perspective."

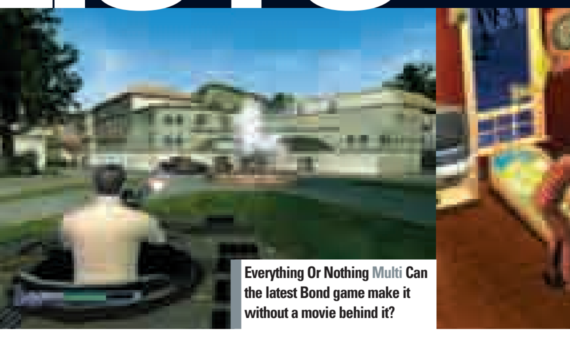
I WILL SURVIVE

Having made it through one storm, it's not surprising that Swordfish is already manning the pumps to ensure such a disaster doesn't happen again in the future – a precaution that seems sadly necessary given the state of the industry at the moment. "I think the current situation with regards to developers going bust is just symptomatic of how the industry has progressed over the past five years," says Williams. "Projects cost more so publishers have less of them and, subsequently, there's less demand for independent developers. The important thing for us to do is to make sure that we're one of the developers that's still standing when the dust finally settles." Although Swordfish has plenty of projects in the pipeline, however, it isn't complacent. "You need to give publishers a reason to work with you," says Williams.

RELEASE LISTS


Metroid: Zero Mission GBA Samus returns in a sort-of-new adventure.


OutRun 2 Arcade Can SEGA undo the last 18 years of bad *OutRun* follow-ups?

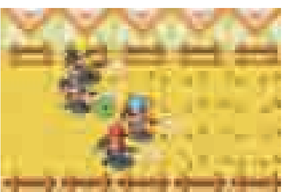

Everything Or Nothing Multi Can the latest Bond game make it without a movie behind it?



HARVEST MOON: FRIENDS OF MINERAL TOWN

Format: Game Boy Advance
Publisher: Ubisoft

It's been a long time coming, but the wait was definitely worth it. Natume's classic franchise finds the perfect home on Nintendo's handheld and we simply can't get enough of the little gem. By the way, if anyone knows the key to Karen's heart, drop a line to the usual address.



COUNTER-STRIKE

Format: Xbox
Publisher: Microsoft

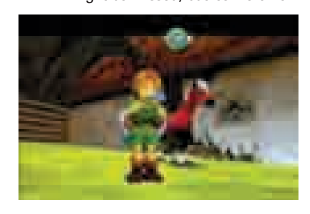
Okay, so it might look a bit ropey by today's standards, and the fact that Microsoft is charging £40 is a bit much, but *Counter-Strike* is still great fun online. Although there's little to enjoy offline, it's a pleasing alternative if you've played too much *Rainbow Six 3*. Be warned, though, we've been practising our head shots.



MAJORA'S MASK

Format: GameCube
Publisher: Nintendo

Considering its classic status, a few people on the team have never played *Zelda*'s N64 sequel. Now that this handy GameCube bonus game has become available we've locked the offenders in our swanky games room and won't let them out until it's completed. The magazine may run late and deadlines might be missed, but it's worth it…





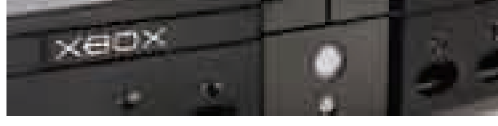
PLAYSTATION2

Month	Title	Publisher	
FEBRUARY '04			
27 February	Bad Boys II	Empire	
27 February	Ghost Recon: Jungle Storm	Ubisoft	
27 February	Headhunter: Redemption	SEGA	
27 February	James Bond 007: Everything Or Nothing	EA	
27 February	Puyo Pop Fever	SEGA	
TBC	Megaman X7	Capcom	
TBC	Outlaw Volleyball	TDK	
TBC	Cy Girls	Konami	
MARCH '04			
05 March	Fallout: Brotherhood Of Steel	Vivendi	
05 March	Nightshade	SEGA	
12 March	.hack//Infection	Atari	
12 March	Tak And The Power Of JuJu	THQ	
19 March	Driv3r	Atari	
26 March	Champions Of Norrath: Realms Of EverQuest	Ubisoft	
26 March	R-Type Final	Metro 3D	
26 March	Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow	Ubisoft	Wanted
TBC	Forbidden Siren	SCEE	Wanted
TBC	Gradius V	Konami	
TBC	Rise to Honour	SCEE	
TBC	Singstar Pop	SCEE	
TBC	SOCOM II	SCEE	
TBC	Syphon Filter: The Omega Strain	SCEE	
TBC	Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles	Konami	
TBC	This Is Football 2004	SCEE	
APRIL '04			
02 April	Iron Storm	Wanadoo	
09 April	Alias	Acclaim	
09 April	The Suffering	Midway	
09 April	Richard Burns Rally	SCi	
TBC	Killzone	SCEE	
TBC	Knights Of The Templar	TDK	
TBC	Legends Of Wrestling: Showdown	Acclaim	
TBC	Trivial Pursuit Unhinged	Atari	
TBC	Van Helsing	Vivendi	
Q1 '04			
TBC	Spider-Man 2	Activision	
TBC	The Getaway 2	SCEE	
TBC	R: Racing Evolution	Namco	
TBC	Megaman Anniversary Collection	Capcom	
TBC	Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater	Konami	Wanted
TBC	Medal Of Honor: Fighter Command	EA	
TBC	Transformers Armada: Prelude To Energon	Atari	
TBC	Sniper Elite	Wanadoo	
TBC	Karaoke Stage	Konami	
TBC	EyeToy: Sports	SCEE	Wanted
TBC	Gran Turismo 4	SCEE	Wanted
TBC	Starcraft: Ghost	Vivendi Universal	



GAMECUBE

Month	Title	Publisher	
FEBRUARY '04			
27 February	James Bond 007: Everything Or Nothing	EA	
27 February	Beyond Good & Evil	Ubisoft	
27 February	Kirby Air Ride	Nintendo	
27 February	Puyo Pop Fever	SEGA	
MARCH '04			
12 March	Final Fantasy: Crystal Chronicles	Nintendo	Wanted
12 March	Resident Evil: Code Veronica X	Capcom	
12 March	Tak And The Power Of JuJu	THQ	
19 March	Disney's Hide 'N' Sneak	Konami	
26 March	Conan	TDK	
26 March	Harvest Moon: It's A Wonderful Life	Nintendo	Wanted
26 March	Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow	Ubisoft	Wanted
TBC	Metal Gear Solid: The Twin Snakes	Konami	
Q1 '04			
TBC	R: Racing Evolution	Namco	
TBC	Wario Ware	Nintendo	
TBC	Geist	Nintendo	
TBC	Bad Boys II	Empire	
TBC	Pokémon Box	Nintendo	
TBC	Pokémon Channel	Nintendo	
TBC	Pokémon Colosseum	Nintendo	Wanted
TBC	Spider-Man 2	Activision	
TBC	Mario Tennis	Nintendo	
TBC	Paper Mario	Nintendo	Wanted
TBC	Phantasy Star Online Episode III: C.A.R.D. Revolution	SEGA	
TBC	Prince Of Persia: The Sands Of Time	Ubisoft	
TBC	Pikmin 2	Nintendo	
TBC	Nintendo Puzzle Collection	Nintendo	
TBC	Mario Golf: Toadstool Tour	Nintendo	



XBOX

Month	Title	Publisher
FEBRUARY '04		
27 February	Bad Boys II	Empire

CALM YOUR FEVERISH ANTICIPATION WITH OUR COMPREHENSIVE LIST OF FORTHCOMING RELEASES



The Sims 2 PC After many add-ons, the sequel is finally coming.

Forbidden Siren PS2 Sony gets ready to out-scare *Resident Evil*.

Middle-Earth Online PC Thought you'd seen the last of Tolkien games?

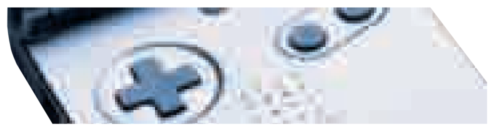
Nightshade PS2 SEGA's sequel returns with added girl power.

27 February	Headhunter: Redemption	SEGA	
27 February	James Bond 007: Everything Or Nothing	EA	
27 February	Puyo Pop Fever	SEGA	
27 February	Unreal II: The Awakening	Atari	
TBC	Silent Scope Complete	Konami	
MARCH '04			
05 March	Fallout: Brotherhood Of Steel	Vivendi	
19 March	Auto Modellista: U.S. Tuned	Capcom	
19 March	Driv3r	Atari	
19 March	Tenchu: Return From Darkness	Activision	
26 March	Dead Man's Hand	Atari	
26 March	Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow	Ubisoft	Wanted
26 March	Steel Battalion: Line Of Contact	Capcom	
26 March	Trivial Pursuit Unhinged	Atari	
TBC	Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles	Konami	
APRIL '04			
09 April	Alias	Acclaim	
09 April	The Suffering	Midway	
Q1 '04			
TBC	Legends Of Wrestling: Showdown	Acclaim	
TBC	BC	Microsoft	
TBC	Ninja Gaiden	Microsoft	Wanted
TBC	Halo 2	Microsoft	Wanted
TBC	Call Of Duty: Finest Hour	Activision	
TBC	Dancing Stage Unleashed	Konami	
TBC	Knights Of The Temple	TDK	
TBC	Full Spectrum Warrior	THQ	
TBC	Operation Flashpoint	Codemasters	
TBC	Fable	Microsoft	Wanted
TBC	True Fantasy Live Online	Microsoft	Wanted
TBC	Kameo: Elements Of Power	Microsoft	Wanted
TBC	Sudeki	Microsoft	
TBC	Deus Ex: Invisible War	Eidos	
TBC	Dead Or Alive Ultimate	Microsoft	



PC

Month	Title	Publisher	
MARCH '04			
05 March	Deus Ex: Invisible War	Eidos	
12 March	Painkiller	DreamCatcher	Wanted
19 March	Driv3r	Atari	
19 March	Medal Of Honor: Pacific Assault	EA	
19 March	The Sims 2	EA	Wanted
19 March	Unreal Tournament 2004	Atari	
26 March	Battlefield: Vietnam	EA	
26 March	Beyond Divinity	Digital Jester	
26 March	Dead Man's Hand	Atari	
26 March	Far Cry	Ubisoft	Wanted
TBC	Soldner: Secret Of Wars	JoWood	
Q1 '04			
TBC	Half-Life 2	Vivendi	Wanted
TBC	Conan	TDK	
TBC	Vampire: The Masquerade – Bloodlines	Activision	
TBC	The Movies	Activision	
TBC	Alias	Acclaim	
TBC	EverQuest II	Ubisoft	
TBC	Mythica	Microsoft	
TBC	Doom III	Activision	Wanted
TBC	Warhammer Online	SEGA	
TBC	Armed And Dangerous	Activision	
TBC	Evil Genius	Vivendi	
TBC	Thief 3	Eidos	
TBC	Richard Burns Rally	SCI	
TBC	Full Spectrum Warrior	THQ	
TBC	Black & White 2	Microsoft	
TBC	S.T.A.L.K.E.R.: Oblivion Lost	THQ	Wanted
TBC	Sniper Elite	Wanadoo	



GAME BOY ADVANCE

Month	Title	Publisher	
FEBRUARY '04			
27 February	Sonic Battle	SEGA	
MARCH '04			
05 March	Jet Set Radio	SEGA	
05 March	Max Payne	Rockstar	
05 March	Mega Man Battle Chip Challenge	Capcom	
12 March	Sabre Wulf	THQ	Wanted
12 March	Tak And The Power of JuJu	THQ	
19 March	Disney's Aladdin	Capcom	
19 March	Dr Seuss' The Cat In The Hat	Vivendi	
19 March	Sword Of Mana	Nintendo	
Q1 '04			
TBC	Fire Emblem	Nintendo	
TBC	Pokémon Leaf Green/Fire Red	Nintendo	Wanted
TBC	Hamtaro: Rainbow Rescue	Nintendo	
TBC	Metroid: Zero Mission	Wanted	Wanted
TBC	Mario Golf: Advance Tour	Nintendo	
TBC	Mr Driller	Nintendo	
TBC	Space Channel 5: Ulala's Cosmic Attack	SEGA	
TBC	Wings Advance	Zoo Digital	

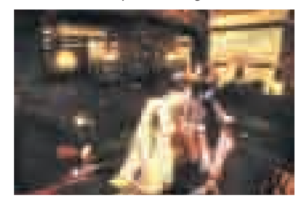
PLEASE NOTE: While every effort has been made to ensure these dates are correct at the time of going to press, they are liable to change at short notice. It's not our fault, mind. We just print what we're told. Don't shoot the messenger…

gamesTM ON THE HORIZON

OTOGI: HYAKKI TOUBATSU EMAKI

Format: Xbox
Publisher: SEGA

The original *Otogi* was a love/hate affair, so we're interested to see how the sequel is shaping up. Visually, this knocks seven bells out of the original, and early reports suggest that the combat system has also been refined. *Otogi* didn't sell well over here, so this may not even get released…



PAC-MAN VS

Format: GameCube
Publisher: Nintendo/EA TBC

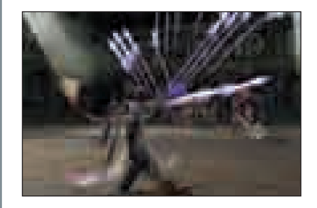
After becoming totally addicted to Namco and Nintendo's latest collaboration, we're going to be absolutely devastated if it doesn't make it to the UK. Fortunately, with the game shown at last year's ECTS and the *Zelda* bonus discs getting a UK release, it's looking more likely that we'll get our hands on this.



BUJINGAI

Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: Taito

Now this is looking very sweet; think an amalgamation of *Devil May Cry*, *Shinobi* and *Otogi* and you'll have a good idea of what Taito's *Bujingai* is about. But with a plot concerned with saving 23rd Century nuclear satellites, this is hardly traditional warrior territory. From the brief play we've had, this has the potential to be quite special. Let's hope it gets a UK release.





THE PEOPLE IN THE GAMES INDUSTRY TELL IT LIKE IT IS…

TIME TO TAKE A PLACE ON THE WORLD STAGE



Compared with all other screen entertainment markets, gaming is still ghettoised. Some may wish to keep it that way, including, perhaps, dedicated gamers. Lifestyle magazines and newspapers now offer some coverage of gaming while dedicated game magazines have not expanded to anything other than pure games coverage since the days when I worked on *Crash* and *Zzap! 64*. Happy days were had in that small pond but gaming has moved on since then. Mass-market status is the name of the game – it has always been the industry's aspiration. It's ironic therefore, to find that having reached that 'Holy Grail', its public manifestation is still elusive.

It's true that the games industry doesn't have glamorous human icons to wheel out, like TV, film or music. It's also had some bad press but then so did rock 'n' roll, TV and video when they were new. Enough of the negatives; it's time to move on.

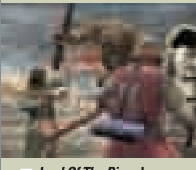
Some of the games media need to be more reflective of their audience's lifestyles. Publishers need to be more adventurous in their marketing, and ELSPA needs to provide the vehicle for celebrating the success of gaming in UK. It is the third biggest market in the world, after all, with Western Europe likely to overtake North America as the biggest next year. Nearly all the global games companies have their European HQs here, most games in Europe are distributed from the UK, and many worldwide hits are developed here. It's time to demonstrate that the UK is at the centre of European gaming and let the world know about it.

Let's hope that everyone who is passionate about gaming will embrace the future whole-heartedly and that we can all take this exciting industry to the next level of its development.

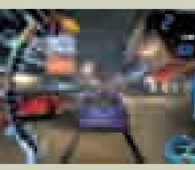
Roger Bennett
Director General, ELSPA

FROM THE FRONT

EA'S BANK BALANCE CONTINUES TO RISE WHILE MICROSOFT GETS ITS MACHINES CONNECTED



Lord Of The Rings has boosted EA's takings.



EA CEO Larry Probst has had a very good year.





Bill Gates – by far the richest man on this page.

ELECTRONIC ARTS' THIRD QUARTER IS A MONSTROUS SUCCESS

NEXT STOP, THE WORLD

Had you paid close attention to the multiformat top-ten chart over the last few months, you may have noticed several EA titles cosily occupying the top half of the line-up. As we went to press, *Need For Speed: Underground* has spent its fifth consecutive week at the number one spot and has now sold a staggering 5.5 million units worldwide (a fact that still amazes us). It should come as no surprise then to find that EA's financial-year third quarter has been a record-breaking success for the company, with a final net income of $392 million (a jaw-dropping £214 million).

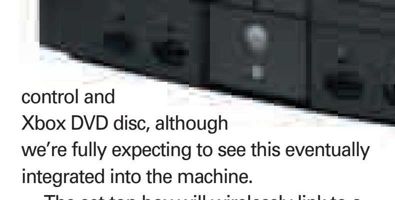
"This was another record quarter for EA," revealed Larry Probst, EA's chairman and CEO. "We once again strengthened our position on current-generation consoles and on the PC – and were number one in both North America and Europe, with the company having 11 titles that sold over a million units in the quarter."

EA's excellent third quarter means that it continues to remain on target for its projected revenue of $2.91-2 billion for this financial year and this should be achieved thanks to the likes of *James Bond 007: Everything Or Nothing* and the next title in its *Street* franchise, *NFL Street*.

Considering the company is performing so well, it was perhaps inevitable that the latest

ANYTHING SONY CAN DO…

MICROSOFT'S XBOX RECEIVES NEW MEDIA UPDATE

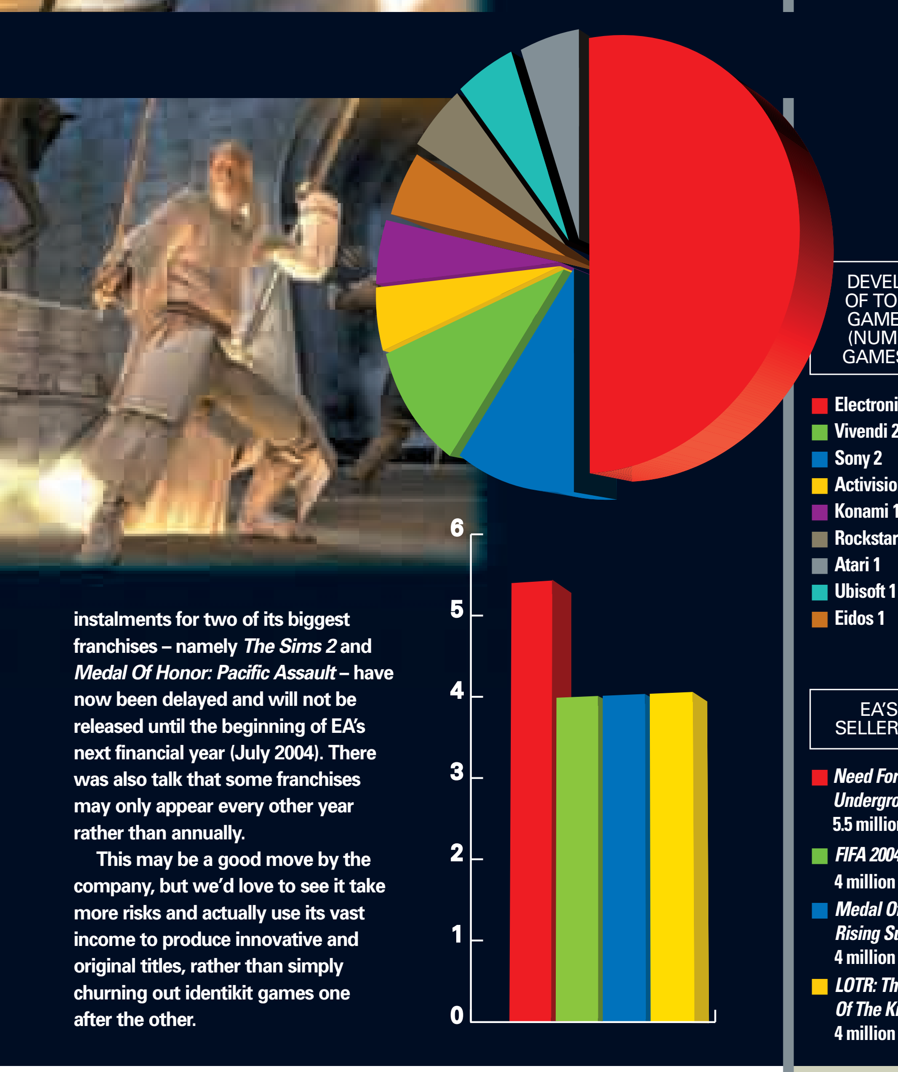


Microsoft and Sony have briefly turned their attentions away from the console wars to concentrate on the next big battle – home media entertainment. Sony may well have bolted into the market with its PSX, but Microsoft is prepared to fight it every step of the way and has just announced a new upgrade for its Xbox. The Media Center Extender (MCX) is Microsoft's answer to Sony's new multimedia machine and will enable Xbox owners to wirelessly connect to their PC and gain access to movies, images or music stored on the computer.

Revealed at January's Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas, the MCX will initially be released as a standalone product that will consist of a set-top box, a remote control and Xbox DVD disc, although we're fully expecting to see this eventually integrated into the machine.

The set-top box will wirelessly link to a home PC and will use the same software found on Microsoft's new Windows XP Media Center Edition operating system that was also announced at the show.

It's an interesting move by Microsoft, although we're not sure if it's going to interest gamers. Naysayers have been saying for years that the Xbox is little more than a PC in a box, and Bill Gates may have finally proven them right.



DEVELOPERS OF TOP 20 UK GAMES, 2003 (NUMBER OF GAMES EACH)

- Electronic Arts 10
- Vivendi 2
- Sony 2
- Activision 1
- Konami 1
- Rockstar 1
- Atari 1
- Ubisoft 1
- Eidos 1

EA'S BIG SELLERS, 2003

- *Need For Speed: Underground* 5.5 million units
- *FIFA 2004* 4 million units
- *Medal Of Honor: Rising Sun* 4 million units
- *LOTR: The Return Of The King* 4 million units

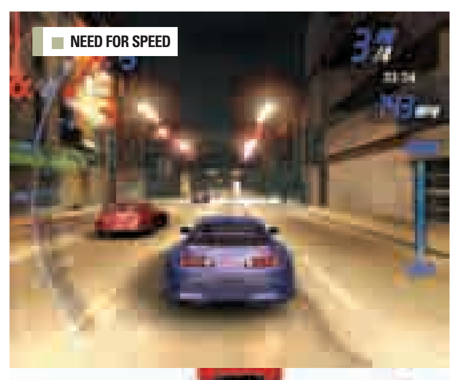
instalments for two of its biggest franchises – namely *The Sims 2* and *Medal Of Honor: Pacific Assault* – have now been delayed and will not be released until the beginning of EA's next financial year (July 2004). There was also talk that some franchises may only appear every other year rather than annually.

This may be a good move by the company, but we'd love to see it take more risks and actually use its vast income to produce innovative and original titles, rather than simply churning out identikit games one after the other.

UK MULTIFORMAT TOP TEN

	Title	Publisher	Format
1	Need For Speed: Underground	EA Games	Multi
2	Norton Internet Security 2004	Norton	PC
3	FIFA 2004	EA Sports	Multi
4	The Simpsons: Hit And Run	Vivendi	Multi
5	LOTR: Return Of The King	EA Games	Multi
6	Mafia	Take 2	Multi
7	EyeToy: Play	SCEE	PS2
8	The Sims: Bustin' Out	EA Games	Multi
9	Grand Theft Auto: Double Pack	Rockstar Games	Multi
10	Medal Of Honor: Rising Sun	EA Games	Multi

Another whitewash for Electronic Arts this month, with half the top ten bearing the EA logo. And another good month for Norton – proof that good old-fashioned gameplay will always win out. Er, no, hang on…


NEED FOR SPEED


EYETOY

GRAND THEFT AUTO

WILL SONY'S HANDHELD BE EVEN MORE POWERFUL?

PSP UPGRADE?

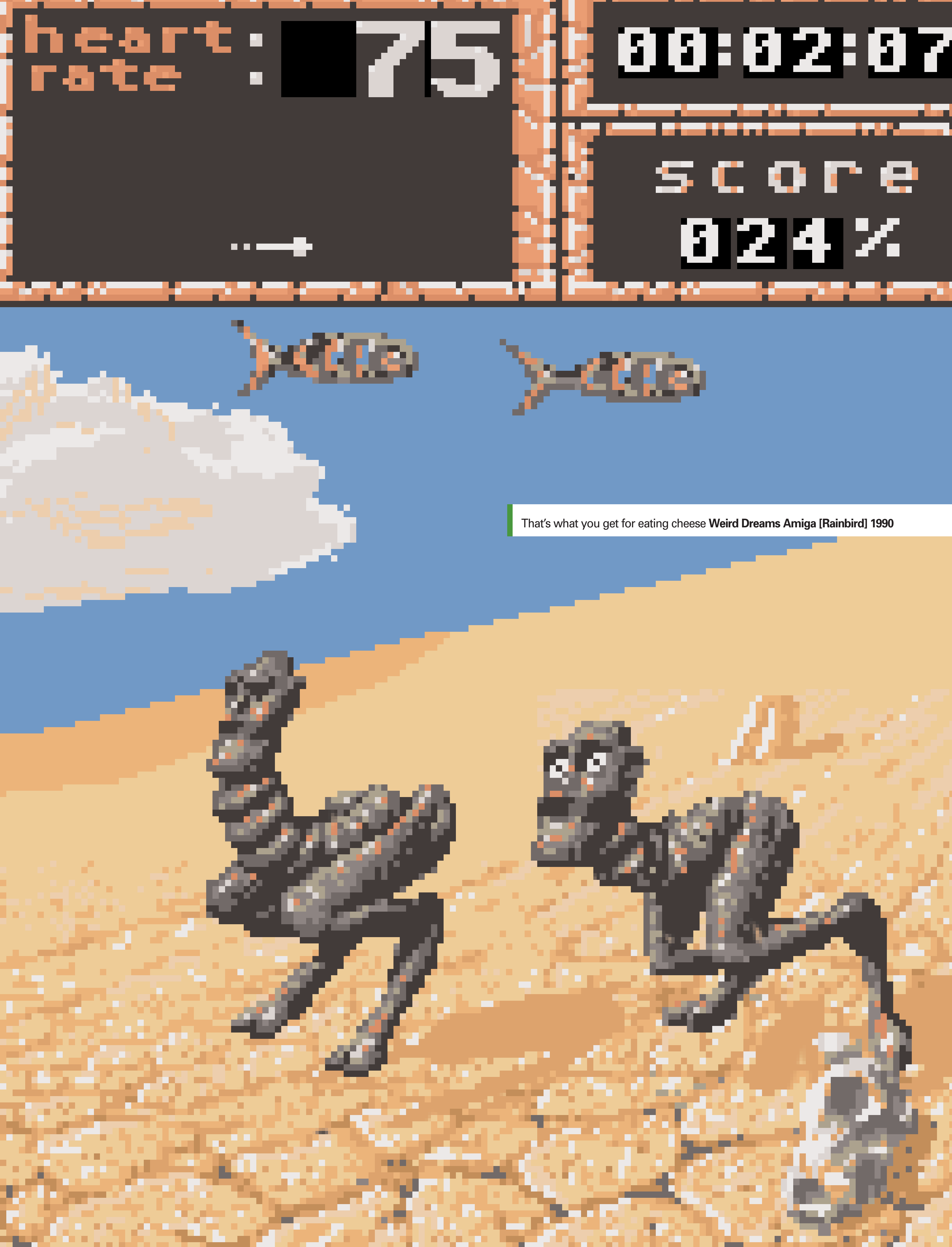
After last month's news about several developers being unhappy with the current amount of RAM in Sony's new handheld – the PSP – it's been revealed that Sony may have changed its mind. Much of this is speculation at the moment, as SCEE refuses to give any additional information about the machine, but it's looking increasingly likely that the machine could well now come with 32Mb of RAM.

Not only would this put the handheld even more in line with its non-portable bigger brother, but it would also allow for far easier ports. "They've recognised that this is the last hurdle to creating full-strength 3D games on the PSP," revealed one insider. "The system was always nearly as powerful as the PS2, but the lack of RAM was a real worry."

Even with this impressive upgrade, this could still spell trouble for the PSP. With PS2 games being potentially easier to port, we're worried that many developers will see the machine as an easy way to make a quick buck (though we'd hardly be upset with an identical port of *Pro Evo 3*).







That's what you get for eating cheese **Weird Dreams Amiga [Rainbird] 1990**

METAL GEAR SOLID: THE TWIN SNAKES



"MR MIYAMOTO IS MY MENTOR OF GAMES DESIGN. I AM TREMENDOUSLY EXCITED"
HIDEO KOJIMA, VICE PRESIDENT, KONAMI JAPAN

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

"SNAKES. WHY'D IT HAVE TO BE SNAKES?"

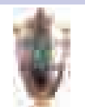
METAL GEAR SOLID + METAL GEAR SOLID 2 + VERSUS FIGHT SEQUENCES = MGS: TWIN SNAKES

With Silicon Knights' pedigree of psychological horror you can expect a suitably atmospheric experience.

Some impressive graphical effects have been thrown at *The Twin Snakes*, though the frame rate suffers a little.

METAL GEAR SOLID: THE TWIN SNAKES

GAMECUBE



DEVELOPER PROFILE

■ *Twin Snakes* is a bit of an odd one in that's it's a collaboration between Konami (*Metal Gear Solid, Pro Evo, Castlevania*), Nintendo (*Mario, Zelda, Donkey Kong*) and Nintendo second-party Silicon Knights (*Eternal Darkness, Legacy Of Kain*). The main development duties have fallen to Silicon Knights.

HISTORY

■ **ETERNAL DARKNESS: SANITY'S REQUIEM** 2002 [GC]
■ **BLOOD OMEN: LEGACY OF KAIN** 1996 [Multiformat]
■ **CYBER EMPIRES** 1993 [PC]

SNAKE – IT TASTES LIKE CHICKEN APPARENTLY. NOT THAT GAMECUBE OWNERS WOULD KNOW

Very rarely do games designers get to indulge themselves, but make yourself desirable enough and it seems that's exactly what you get to do. Hideo Kojima's respect for Shigeru Miyamoto's work is well-documented, so their decision to join forces and create a *Metal Gear* game for the GameCube didn't come as much of a surprise. Of course, we had hoped for something more than a remake of a five-year-old game, but never mind… *Metal Gear Solid: The Twin Snakes* is a three-way collaboration in which Nintendo's only real input is letting its second-party devco Silicon Knights work with Konami. It's an opportunity for all parties really: Silicon Knights get to work with the legendary Kojima-san; Kojima gets to fulfil a life's ambition and work with Miyamoto-san; Nintendo gets a *Metal Gear Solid* title on its machine; and gamers get treated to a remake of one of the greatest games of the past decade… although you have to ask whether that's as good a deal as it first sounds.

This is the second time a classic PSone title has been brought up to date on the GameCube, but where the *Resident Evil* remake gave us a host of new areas, *Twin Snakes* offers us an upgrade based on less noticable elements. Silicon Knights has worked hard to create a decent enough graphics engine, although it's still someway short of the *MGS2* comparison we were hoping for. Admittedly, the team has gone to town somewhat with the particle effects, transparencies, light-sourcing and bump-mapping to bring the Alaskan landscape to life, but this too has caused problems: last year's E3 demo had major frame-rate issues. While much of this appears to have been fixed, there are still areas where the framerate is rather choppy.

Graphics aside, there are several other changes to the original game. As *Twin Snakes* is essentially *MGS* brought to life in the *MGS2* world, Solid Snake naturally has all of his trademark *MGS2* moves, such as hanging from ledges, hiding in lockers (or concealing bodies in them), using magazines to distract enemies and shooting from a first-person view. As you couldn't do any of this in the original, it does change the way you play the game.

Silicon Knights has also stamped its mark on the game in two ways. Firstly, it has added all manner of Nintendo references and elements that screw with your head (though revealing these here would ruin the experience). The second major tweak concerns the soundtrack; all the audio content of the game (music, sound effects and voice acting) has been re-recorded, so everything now comes in crisp Pro Logic II – *Twin Snakes* at least beats its predecesor on that score.

The final, and possibly most interesting, addition to the game is the work of Ryuhei Kitamura. The acclaimed film director has been brought in to work on the title's cut-scenes and it really shows. The combination of the updated graphics, re-recorded audio and Kitamura's trademark camera angles, fighting style and tracking techniques results in the original cut-scenes receiving some well-deserved polish.

Unfortunately, the gameplay itself is where the problems could ultimately lie and for now, we remain a little unsure. With the general controls still a bit twitchy and enemy AI proving haphazard at times, we're anxious to see what the final code has in store…

DETAILS

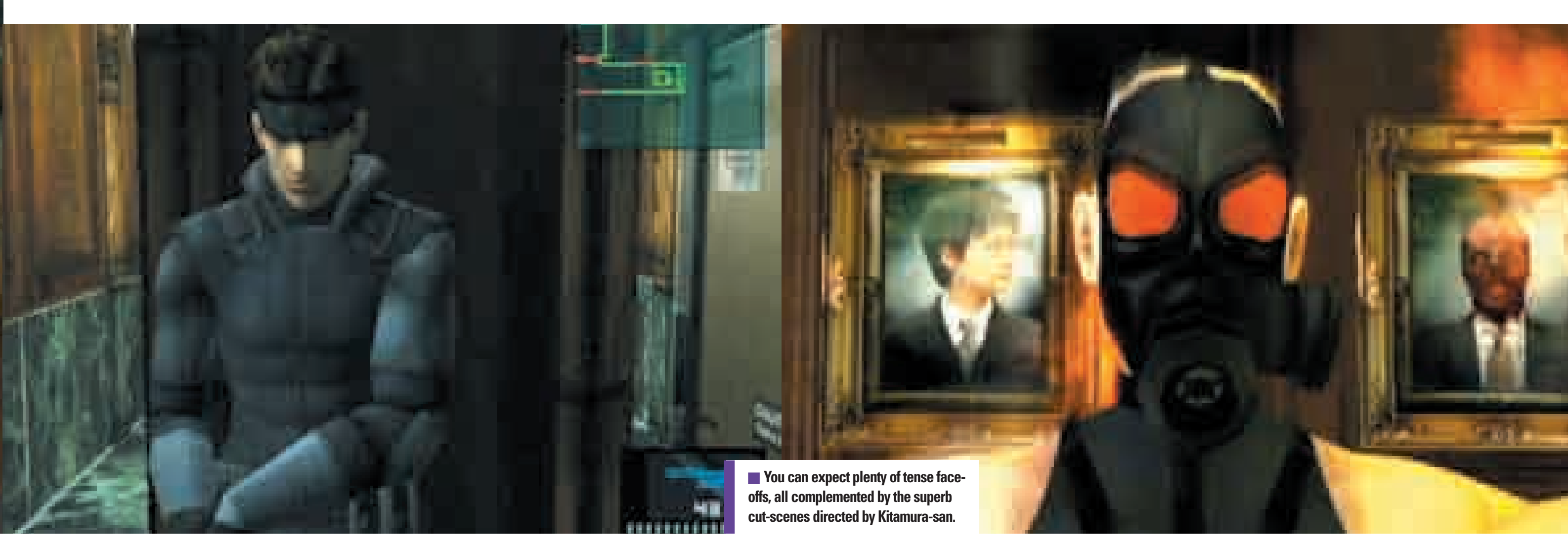
FORMAT: GameCube
ORIGIN: Canada
PUBLISHER: Konami
DEVELOPER: Silicon Knights
RELEASE: April '04 (Japan: 11 March, US: April '04)
GENRE: Stealth Adventure
PLAYERS: 1

■ A remake of the PSone's definitive stealth adventure game developed, under the guidance of Hideo Kojima, by the team behind *Eternal Darkness*.

"IT'S WORTH PLAYING THE GAME JUST TO SEE RYUHEI KITAMURA'S CUT-SCENES"

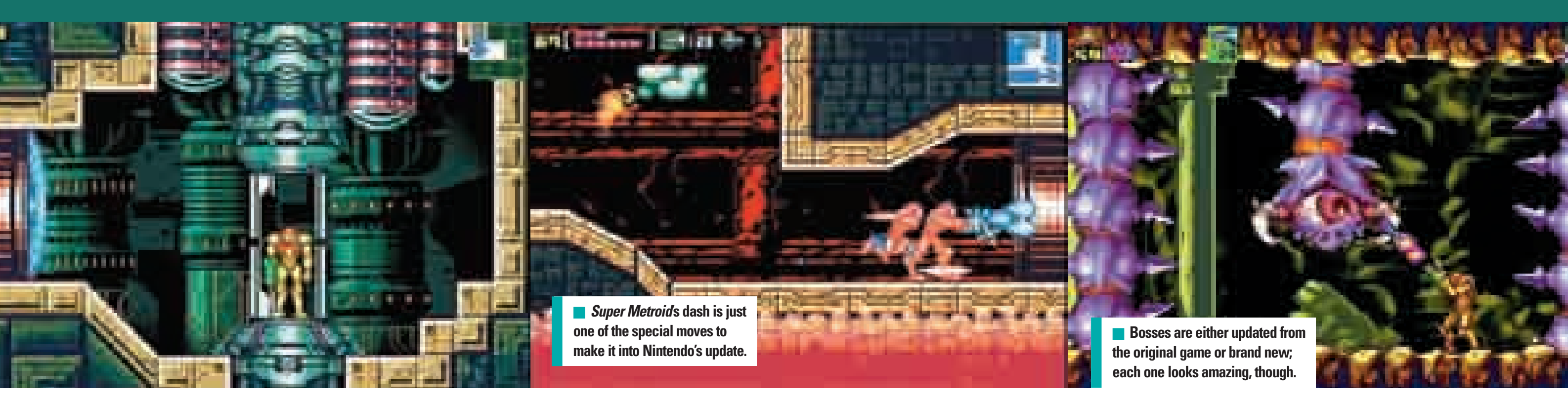
A STEP IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION

All the game's cut-scenes have been handled by acclaimed Japanese cult-horror director Ryuhei Kitamura. Probably most famous for *Versus* (a must-see if you haven't already had the pleasure), he's well-known for his outrageous, *Matrix*-esque fight sequences and in-your-face gore. He hasn't held back with *Twin Snakes*, and has written plenty of intensive fight scenes for Solid Snake's confrontations with the game's main boss characters. The most impressive examples are those involving Solid Snake and Ninja locked in battle in an enclosed area. It's worth playing the game just to see the cut-scenes.



■ You can expect plenty of tense face-offs, all complemented by the superb cut-scenes directed by Kitamura-san.

METROID: ZERO MISSION



Super Metroid's dash is just one of the special moves to make it into Nintendo's update.

Bosses are either updated from the original game or brand new; each one looks amazing, though.

SAMUS' ORIGINAL OUTING RETURNS IN STYLE AFTER A BIT OF A FACELIFT

DETAILS

FORMAT: Game Boy Advance
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Nintendo
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: Q1 '04 (US: Out Now)
GENRE: Platformer
PLAYERS: 1

Buoyed by the success of *Metroid Fusion*, Nintendo has updated the original NES *Metroid* game.

After the critical and commercial success of last year's *Metroid* titles, there was never any doubt that sequels to both *Metroid Prime* and *Fusion* would appear. While little has been said about *Metroid Prime 2*, Nintendo's next GBA title is only a few months away and is already looking very special. Surprisingly, *Zero Mission* is actually a remake of the first *Metroid* title and not an original product like *Fusion*. Gamers who completed *Fusion* and subsequently unlocked the original NES classic may feel a little miffed about the series' change in direction, though Nintendo has assured us that *Zero Mission* is more than just a simple update.

> "EVERYTHING THAT'S GREAT ABOUT THE METROID SERIES HAS BEEN SQUEEZED ONTO ONE COMPACT CARTRIDGE"



The environments in *Zero Mission* are already looking impressive and promise to improve on *Metroid Fusion*.

Like Capcom's *Resident Evil* remake, *Zero Mission* will contain more than enough extras to convince new and experienced gamers that it's a title that's well worth exploring. Apart from sporting an improved version of *Fusion*'s graphics engine, *Zero Mission* will also include the numerous abilities Samus acquired in her last outing, as well as several new skills like the Zip Line and Power Grip. Other handy additions include the return of *Super Metroid*'s map system and separate ammo for each weapon, meaning that Samus is even more powerful than she was in *Fusion*. Add a selection of new levels and bosses and it would appear that we could soon be playing the definitive *Metroid* game.

Indeed, it appears that Nintendo has taken everything that's great about the *Metroid* series and squeezed it into one compact cartridge. Most importantly, perhaps, is a brand new story that will now explain the *Metroid* mythos via some very handy cut-scenes; Nintendo is promising that even *Metroid*'s fans will be in for a few surprises…

The developer is still reluctant to reveal just how much new content is going to appear in *Zero Mission*, but considering the shortness of *Fusion* we're expecting to see more than five hours of play. While we'd admit that a brand new adventure would have been more interesting, it would be rather mean-spirited of us to not want today's gamers to experience one of the best NES games ever made (and with a new lick of paint, no less).

Considering Samus' recent outings have been of an incredibly high standard (especially the superb *Metroid Prime*), we're confident that she'll stay on form here.


eMag

STAR WARS BATTLEFRONT

GET READY FOR BATTLE, STAR WARS STYLE

DETAILS
FORMAT: PC, PlayStation2, Xbox
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: LucasArts
DEVELOPER: Pandemic Studios
RELEASE: Q4 '04
GENRE: Online Shooter
PLAYERS: 1-32

It's been a long time coming, but someone has finally realised that Electronic Arts' *Battlefield 1942* is ideally suited to the *Star Wars* universe…

There's been a disturbance in the Force of late, and it's been proved that it's still possible to make a great *Star Wars* game out of George Lucas' commercially saturated universe. *Star Wars Galaxies* and *Rebel Strike III* were above average, while *Knights Of The Old Republic* was superb, so we're expecting great things from Pandemic Studios' latest release. *X-Wing Vs TIE Fighter* has already shown how enjoyable it is to take part in massive online battles, so imagine a *Battlefield 1942*-style game set on the likes of Tatooine, Naboo and Hoth. This is exactly what Pandemic Studios is planning, and if early footage is anything to go by *Battlefront* could well make amends for the developer's disappointing *Star Wars: The Clone Wars*.

One of the most impressive aspects of *Star Wars Battlefront* is its sheer scale and ambition. LucasArts has already stated that 'all the greatest battles' from the five films to date will be included, so potentially we could be recreating the Battle of Endor, crippling AT-ATs and reliving both assaults on the Empire's Death Star. Of course, we're fully expecting to see plenty of stand-alone missions that take their inspiration from outside the movies, but *Star Wars* fans will be more than happy taking part in any scenes from the actual films.

All the hype about *Battlefront* would be in vain, however, if the gameplay wasn't able to back it up, but it's already looking like gamers will have plenty to get to grips with when the title is released later this year. The most interesting element by far is the Galactic Conquest mode; players will find themselves in raging wars and will have to dominate a planet by capturing each of its checkpoints. When this monumental task has been achieved you'll have nine more planets to occupy. Once a planet has fallen you'll be able to unlock new features. Nothing's been revealed yet, but we're expecting them to include new playable characters and (hopefully) more vehicles.

Even without the sprawling Galactic Conquest, *Battlefront* is still shaping up to be rather special and features an extensive single-player mode as well as a whole selection of multiplayer games. With 20 different warriors representing four factions – Rebel Alliance, Imperial Army, Clone Army and Droid Army – and over 15 vehicles (finally, we can control AT-ATs) this could be every *Star Wars* fan's Holy Grail.

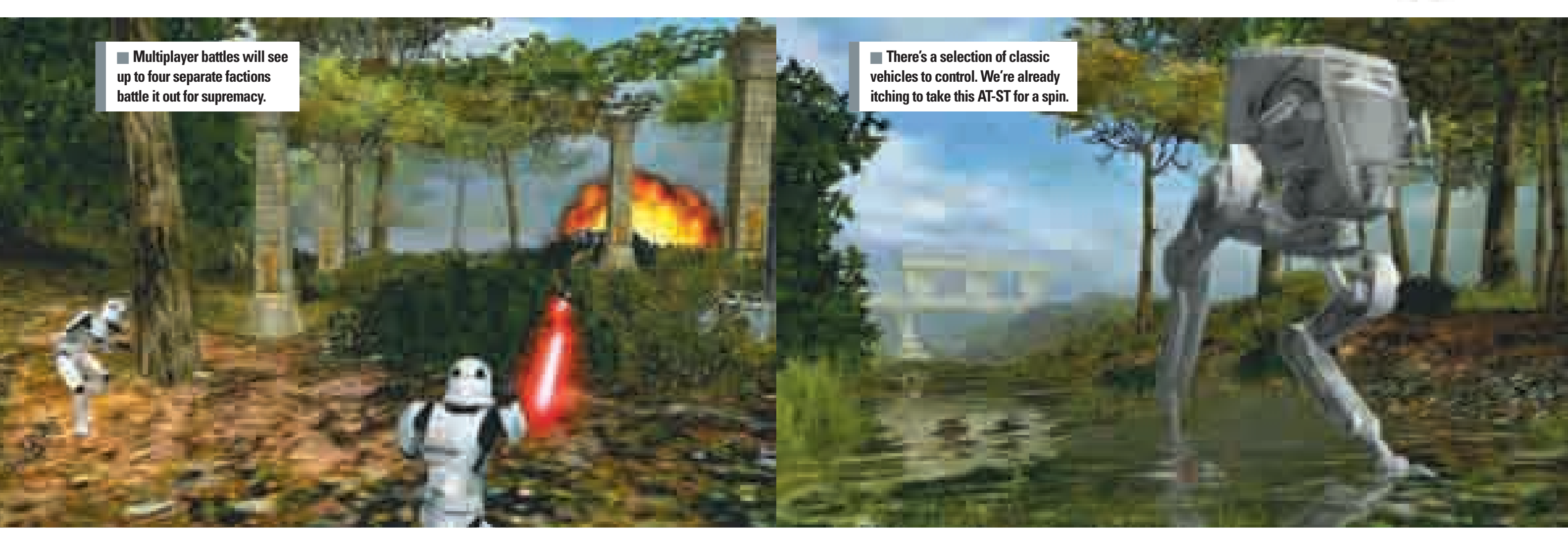
Add to this the fact that the game's set in two distinct timelines (the original trilogy and parts *I* and *II*) and it's obvious that Pandemic is leaving no stone unturned. The dual settings alone are quite enticing and Pandemic has thoroughly absorbed all five films to make the experience as authentic as possible. Unsurprisingly, certain vehicles and locations will not feature in each time arc (Naboo, for example, has only appeared in the latest films) but this will at least ensure that each setting will be distinct from its counterparts.

In addition to its expansive game modes and locations, *Battlefront*'s aesthetics are also looking to be of an extremely high quality. The use of John Williams' superb score goes without saying and it's supported by some impressive visuals. The environments we've seen are richly textured and feature plenty of lighting and particle effects. Locations from the films are instantly recognisable and are a huge jump from the mediocrity of *Clone Wars*. There's still time for Pandemic to turn towards the Dark side, but with any luck its winning streak will continue...

"THIS IS RED 5 STANDING BY"

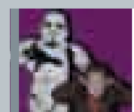
***Star Wars Battlefront* may cater for the single player, but online play will be the main draw for many gamers. PlayStation2 and Xbox owners will be able to play with or against 15 other gamers online (or 31 players via LAN) and can use their console's headsets to communicate vital information and *Star Wars* one-liners. PC owners, on the other hand, expect a little more to their online games, so Pandemic has upped the stakes. The ability to play with 31 other players online (or 63 via LAN) is not something to be sniffed at and the thought of taking part in huge airborne battles is sending shivers down our spines. Let's just hope we get to take a Speeder Bike for a ride…**

"AFTER THE DISAPPOINTING CLONE WARS, PANDEMIC STUDIOS HAS UPPED ITS GAME CONSIDERABLY"



Multiplayer battles will see up to four separate factions battle it out for supremacy.

There's a selection of classic vehicles to control. We're already itching to take this AT-ST for a spin.



DEVELOPER PROFILE

Pandemic Studios was formed in 1999 and has development houses in Los Angeles, California and Brisbane. The 150 staff are headed by Josh Resnick and Andrew Goldman and are currently working on several titles – including *Full Spectrum Warrior* – for the likes of THQ, Activision and Electronic Arts.

HISTORY

- **STAR WARS: THE CLONE WARS** 2002 [Multi]
- **ARMY MEN: RTS** 2002 [Multi]
- **DARK REIGN II** 2000 [PC]

Whether you're playing as a Storm Trooper or a Rebel Soldier, *Battlefront's* atmosphere promises an immersive experience.

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

FORCE OR FARCE?

BATTLEFIELD 1942 - WORLD WAR II + STAR WARS = STAR WARS BATTLEFRONT

"THIS WILL PUT FANS AND GAMERS IN THE HEAT OF THE ACTION AS THEY RELIVE ALL THE EPIC BATTLES OF THE STAR WARS UNIVERSE"

LUCASARTS PRESS RELEASE

Checkpoints are littered throughout Conquest mode and all must be captured to achieve victory.

SPLINTER CELL: PANDORA TOMORROW

The new tricks up Sam's sleeve offer an expanded repertoire of solutions to each problem.

SAM FISHER PREPARES TO RE-EMERGE FROM THE SHADOWS

With the recent deluge of limp *Splinter Cell* clones failing miserably to make our wait for Sam Fisher's hotly anticipated return any more bearable, stealth fans will be rejoicing that *Pandora Tomorrow* is now lurking just around the corner. Facing the monumental task of living up to the benchmark defined by the original, Ubisoft appears to have taken a wise approach to the game's evolution that should ensure the chasing pack will have a whole new set boundaries to aspire to come 26 March.

On booting up the fully playable preview of *Pandora* it's immediately obvious that the winning gameplay has undergone very little change, providing a proven base on which to build, and sidestepping the risk that any revolutionary new concepts might fail to scale the same heights as before. The opening mission doubles as a tutorial this time, allowing newbies to learn the basics while letting more experienced agents get straight into the field. There are a couple of new manoeuvres to get to grips with – such as the SWAT Roll for covertly crossing doorways and the ability to fire your weapon while dangling upside down – but, subtle tweaks aside, fans of the first game should welcome the familiarity.

But don't think that this is simply more of the same, nor that Ubisoft hasn't acknowledged the first game's faults and taken positive action; equally evident is the level of improvement that has been lavished on these well-known foundations. The environment against which Sam plays out his covert adventures has undergone an inspired revamp, from both an aesthetic and level-design standpoint. Backdrops are far more lush and imaginative than before, including a jungle level in broad daylight and one mission aboard a speeding train, pushing the cutting-edge visuals and celebrated lighting engine even harder. More significantly, the constraining linearity has been remedied wherever possible to enable multiple routes around objectives.

Encouragingly, in simply learning from its mistakes and fleshing out its already formidable strengths, it's hard to see how *SC:PT* can fail to better its predecessor in every department.

> "IT'S HARD TO SEE HOW PANDORA TOMORROW CAN FAIL TO BETTER ITS PREDECESSOR IN EVERY DEPARTMENT"

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox, PS2, GameCube, PC
ORIGIN: Canada
PUBLISHER: Ubisoft
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: 26 March
GENRE: Stealth Action
PLAYERS: 1 (1-4 Online)

The modern classic gets a coat of finesse and some multiplayer options.



Imaginative locations and detailed backdrops lend an air of sophistication to missions.


eMag

BATTLEFIELD VIETNAM



The normal mapping and lighting techniques make the texture of skin look particularly impressive.

Yes, flying tanks are expected to be a familiar sight, and, yes, you can operate its turret gun in mid air.

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

UPDATED IN EVERY WAY

BATTLEFIELD 1942 + 'NAM × EYE CANDY = BATTLEFIELD VIETNAM

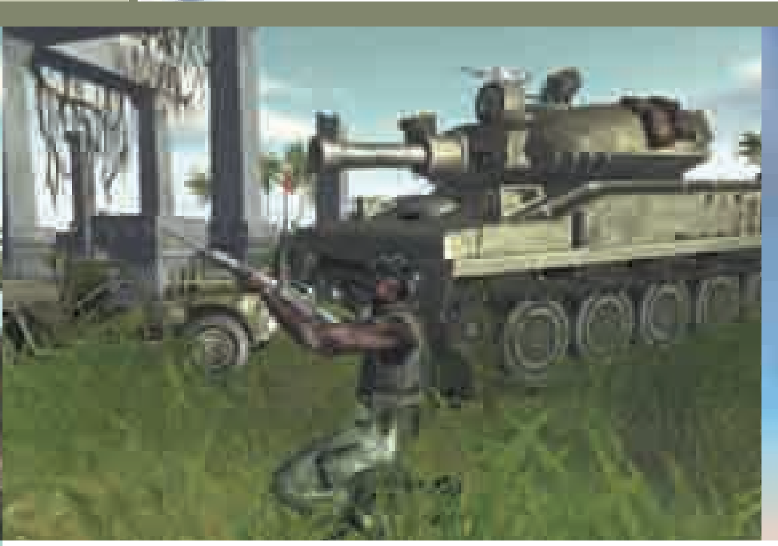
> **"THE GAME DEPLOYS NEW RENDERING AND SOUND ENGINES THAT WILL TAKE PLAYERS DEEPER INTO THE SIXTIES MINDSET"**
>
> *EA PRESS RELEASE*

BATTLEFIELD VIETNAM
PC



PUBLISHER PROFILE
■ Founded in 1982, Electronic Arts has become the world's biggest and best-known entertainment software publisher. Following numerous developer acquisitions EA boasts a strong portfolio of in-house studios and, thanks to brands like *FIFA* and *The Sims*, the sales charts are frequently dominated by its products.

HISTORY
- **BATTLEFIELD 1942** 2002 [PC]
- **THE SIMS** 2000 [PC]
- **MEDAL OF HONOR** 1999 [PSone]





■ The new equipment and superbly designed arenas should provide endless battlefield possibilities.

MAKE WAR, NOT LOVE, AS EA TAKES OVER OUR LIVES ONCE AGAIN

DETAILS
FORMAT: PC
ORIGIN: Canada
PUBLISHER: EA
DEVELOPER: Digital Illusions
RELEASE: Q2 '04
GENRE: FPS
PLAYERS: 1 (Up to 64 online)

■ EA takes the superb *Battlefield* formula into the jungles of Vietnam for an enhanced dose of 32-on-32 jungle action.

Among the recent deluge of unofficial mods based on the popular *Battlefield 1942* framework, *Eve Of Destruction*'s Vietnam War setting proved to be one of the more successful variations on the multi-vehicular warfare theme. Clearly recognising the potential of what appears to be the conflict of choice for FPS developers at the moment, Digital Illusions has singled out the controversial Sixties conflict to host the hotly anticipated sequel to its landmark WWII-based shooter.

Although the single-player portion of the original game was notoriously riddled with flaws, the epic multiplayer skirmishes quickly became an online phenomenon. Enabling up to 64 combatants to engage in ferocious battles from a refreshing number of perspectives, the selection of land, sea and air-based military hardware at your disposal created unprecedented levels of intensity and involvement.

Encouragingly, the runaway success of *1942* and its subsequent expansion packs should have convinced EA to open up the purse strings this time around, safe in the knowledge that a technically advanced and heavily polished version of the same winning formula could reinvent the excitement boundaries of the online FPS. Determined not to lose any of the popularity the franchise already enjoys, the core physics engine that gave *1942* its all-action arcade flavour will remain intact, ensuring gameplay is immediately recognisable to fans. What should be obvious from the outset, however, is the rewritten rendering engine at the heart of the game's striking aesthetic revamp.

Though not yet 18 months old the original has already started to look a little rough around the edges, but *Battlefield Vietnam* brings the visual department fully up to speed with today's video card-crippling standards. Per-pixel lighting adds tremendous vibrancy to the battlefield, while normal mapping gives textures a cutting edge. Due to the dense volume of foliage in the game's jungle environments, a special 'overdrawing' technique was also used to give the scenery a fitting level of authenticity that steers completely clear of the infamous cardboard cut-out effect.

More practically, the heavily forested terrain in the Vietnamese setting presents a whole new playing field that will force players to adopt significantly different approaches to battle than in *1942*. The abundance of environmental cover allows infantry to play a more effective role, with every patch of thick vegetation striking fear into the hearts of vehicle pilots in case a skilfully concealed grenadier is lurking within. The arenas themselves will present a broad spectrum of scenarios, carefully designed to balance the usefulness of available vehicles with a range of potential countermeasures for dealing with each.

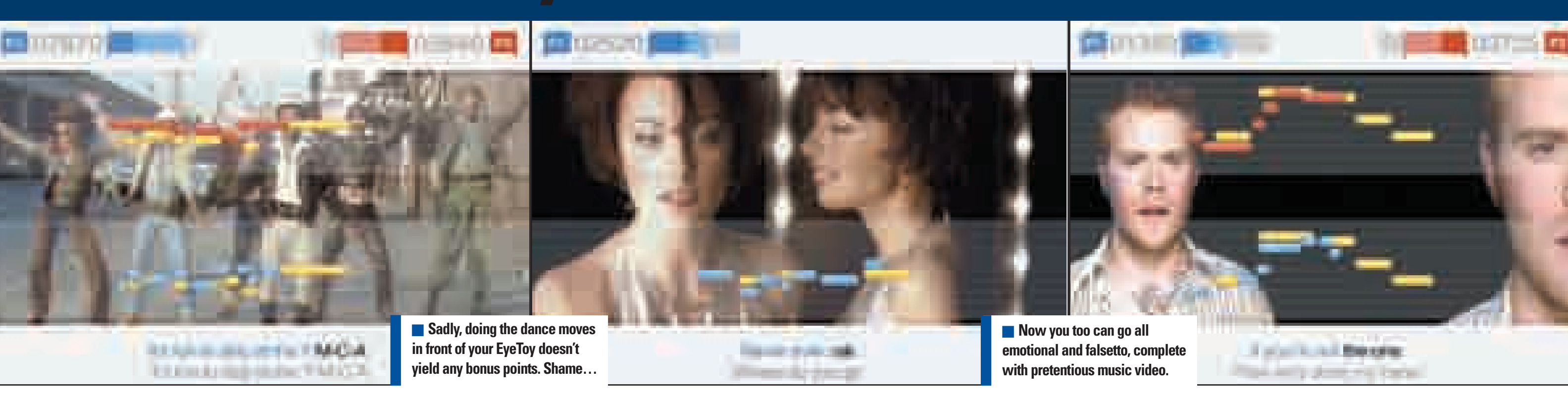
Both the US and NVA forces have a devastating collection of military hardware from the era to take into the fray, with the introduction of assault and transporter helicopters being particularly exciting (see 'Death From Above'). The intriguing palette of possibilities and battle tactics introduced by the new toolbox of weaponry and vehicles, wonderfully packaged in an atmospheric and aesthetically appealing new theatre of war, should make the next evolution of *Battlefield* even more difficult to put down than its predecessor.

All the content is in place at this stage, leaving just an intensive tweaking process between EA and the smell of yet another victory.

DEATH FROM ABOVE
Among the most effective and symbolic pieces of kit used in the Vietnam War, helicopters were an essential inclusion in *Battlefield Vietnam*'s vehicular line-up. Proving invaluable as a weapon of mass destruction or a speedy means of ferrying troops around the battlefield, a chopper can even be used to airlift tanks to more favourable locations. Of course, hovering above the jungle canopy wouldn't be complete without a rousing rendition of *The Ride Of The Valkyries* blaring out of the speakers and, thankfully, the game's soundtrack doesn't disappoint, with Sixties classics by the likes of The Kinks, The Troggs and Jefferson Airplane making up a formidable playlist.

"A NEW PLAYING FIELD WILL FORCE PLAYERS TO ADOPT VERY DIFFERENT APPROACHES TO BATTLE THAN IN 1942"

SINGSTAR CLASSICS/POP



Sadly, doing the dance moves in front of your EyeToy doesn't yield any bonus points. Shame…

Now you too can go all emotional and falsetto, complete with pretentious music video.

SONY AUDITIONS ITS LATEST DIGITAL PARLOUR GAME

DETAILS

FORMAT: PlayStation2
ORIGIN: UK
PUBLISHER: SCEE
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: March
GENRE: Rhythm Action
PLAYERS: 1-2

Karaoke is the new dancing, dancing is the new stealth, stealth is the new bullet time, bullet time is the new 'mindblowing 3D graphics'…

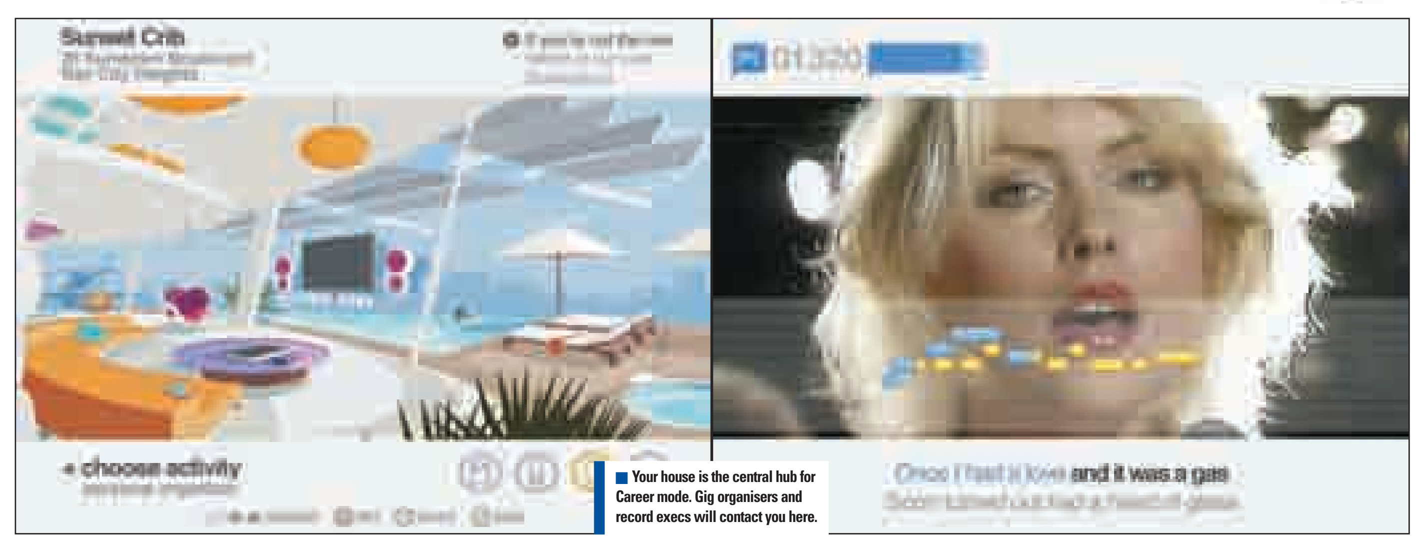
Gaming trends have always been dictated to a certain extent by popular culture. Just as the advent of reality TV was accompanied by huge success for titles like *The Sims*, today's celebrity-obsessed world has paved the way for the revolution that Konami's rhythm action series has been predicting for years. Dance mats, cameras and, most recently, console karaoke sets are now commonplace in homes nationwide, and it just wouldn't be right if the PS2's parent company didn't get involved in this next phase of digital entertainment. With its considerable music-industry presence, Sony would be among the most obvious firms to put out a rhythm action title – which is exactly what it plans to do with the launch of *Singstar*.

The first thing that strikes you about *Singstar* is the presentation. In stark contrast to the playful and childish front end of the EyeToy games, the style here is remarkably clean and clear. Each song will be accompanied by its respective music video and, save for a simple score display and the musical guides, there's nothing to clutter up the screen. Should you tire of staring at the performers for hours on end (unlike Konami's offering, *Singstar*'s tracks are all the original versions), there's even the option to hook up your EyeToy and become the star of the performance.

The inconsistencies in note representations are our biggest gripe so far. If you're not too familiar with the tune you're asked to sing, the fact that every phrase is measured differently on the same stave can cause great confusion. This is, however, remedied somewhat by the reintroduction of the vocal line if you're obviously struggling. Still, at the absolute bargain price of £40 for one of the two compilations and two remarkably high-quality microphones, *Singstar* looks set to be every budding pop idol's dream as well as catering for the more experienced vocalist with the themed collections.

As with Sony's popular camera peripheral, there's plenty of scope for software add-ons – not only additional song discs but also other more varied support for the bundled hardware. As far as we can tell, though, we're still waiting on the first karaoke game to offer true multiplayer harmonising or duets – two things that we'd absolutely love to see and that would make the multi-mic madness all the sweeter.

> "SINGSTAR LOOKS TO BE THE MOST PROFESSIONAL OFFERING IN THE GAMING PERIPHERAL FIELD IN YEARS"



Your house is the central hub for Career mode. Gig organisers and record execs will contact you here.


eMag

DEAD OR ALIVE ULTIMATE

MORE THAN A WOMAN? WHY YES, THERE ARE FIVE OF THEM ACTUALLY

DETAILS
FORMAT: Xbox
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Microsoft
DEVELOPER: Tecmo
RELEASE: Summer TBC (Japan/US: March TBC)
GENRE: Beat-'em-up
PLAYERS: 1-4

This compilation title will feature a graphically updated version of *DOA2*, as well as the Saturn version of the original game. Oh, and online play too…

With *Halo* being such a monumental game, it was easy for Microsoft's critics to have a pop at the company for having just one decent title ready for the Xbox's launch. Of course, most games would look lacklustre next to Bungie's masterpiece, so it wasn't really surprising that *Dead Or Alive 3* didn't receive the acclaim it deserved. For fans of the series, however, the game proved that the Xbox was quite capable of running the sort of software they were looking for (even though *DOA2: Hardcore* on PS2 boasted a greater number of unlockable extras). And it seems that there were plenty of those fans out there, as *DOA3* quickly went on to become the second Xbox game (after *Halo*) to sell over a million copies worldwide.

For Tecmo's Team Ninja such strong sales were something to be proud of, and as the producer, Tomonobu Itagaki, had enjoyed working with Microsoft's hardware so much, the two companies promptly formed a meaningful relationship. Since then, the team has created *Dead Or Alive Xtreme Beach Volleyball* and is currently putting the finishing touches to *Ninja Gaiden* and *Dead Or Alive Ultimate* (formerly *DOA Online*).

Comprising the original *Dead Or Alive* and *Dead Or Alive 2: Hardcore*, this latest instalment in the *DOA* series should appeal to serious fans as well as Xbox Live users (who until now have only had *Capcom Vs. SNK 2* to keep their beat-'em-up needs satisfied). Running on a modified version of the *Xtreme Beach Volleyball* engine, the second game in particular is looking spectacular, featuring high polygon counts and some extremely crisp textures. What's more, the arenas are now set to include additional interactive background elements, weather effects and atmospheric lighting.

However, although the visual side of the game is being upgraded, the actual gameplay is likely to remain unchanged. There should be a number of new costumes available for each character, though these will be opened up in the traditional way rather than through Xbox Live. Seeing as Microsoft's network service has only been embraced by around eight per cent of Japanese Xbox owners so far, Itagaki-san feels that it would be unfair to offer bonus material to such a small portion of his audience.

Of course, if Tecmo was so worried about its audience getting value for money, we'd have to question the fact that just two games are included on this 'ultimate' compilation. While *DOA2* has been revamped for Microsoft's console, the first game remains in its original state and, to make matters worse, is based on the Saturn version rather than the superior arcade original.

According to Itagaki-san, when Tecmo was experimenting with the Xbox hardware two Team Ninja programmers managed to port the PS2 version of *DOA2: Hardcore* onto the console in just two months. Presumably, that code still exists somewhere so why not include it as a bonus? And if the more complex *DOA2: Hardcore* really took just eight weeks to port, then why not include the original arcade game and the Gouraud-shaded PSone version as well?

Surely such features would be fairly inexpensive to implement and would be an incentive for gamers to buy the pack. Maybe Tecmo will consider such issues before the game launches.

CRONUS CONFUSION

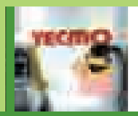
For a while, *DOA Ultimate* was tentatively entitled *Dead Or Alive: Code Cronus* (when it wasn't being called *DOA Online*), though it has since come to light that *Code Cronus* is a different game entirely. Tecmo is keeping things under wraps, but we suspect that the project will be *DOA4* and will more than likely be a launch title for Xbox 2, perhaps even appearing in some form at this year's E3. Of course, that doesn't explain why *DOA Online* became *DOA Ultimate*, despite offering just two games. Presumably, Tecmo will re-release *DOA3* and *DOAXBV* on another pack at a later date, with Live play enabled.

"THE ARENAS INCLUDE NEW INTERACTIVE BACKGROUND SCENERY, WEATHER EFFECTS AND ATMOSPHERIC LIGHTING"



The backgrounds and characters benefit from additional polygons over *DOA3*, though the overall difference is negligible.

New environmental effects really help to set the scene – impressive, considering the game's online status.



DEVELOPER PROFILE

Tecmo has been creating games since 1967 and is responsible for classics such as *Rygar* and *Ninja Gaiden*. The company's most respected studio, Team Ninja (headed by game guru Tomonobu Itagaki), has been behind some of Microsoft's most successful Xbox titles, including *Dead Or Alive 3* and *DOA Xtreme Beach Volleyball*.

HISTORY

- **DOA XTREME BEACH VOLLEYBALL** 2003 [Xbox]
- **DEAD OR ALIVE 3** 2001 [Xbox]
- **DEAD OR ALIVE 2: HARDCORE** 2000 [PS2]

Although the theme should appeal to Western gamers, much of the imagery has a decidedly Eastern flavour to it.

"DOA ULTIMATE OPENS UP A DOOR TO FANS OF THE FIGHTING GENRE AND THE DOA SERIES BY BEING THE FIRST 3D FIGHTING GAME WITH XBOX LIVE CAPABILITIES"
TONY TARPEY, MARKETING MANAGER, TECMO

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

IT'S OLD AND NEW AT THE SAME TIME

RETRO GAMES + NICE GRAPHICS x XBOX LIVE = DOA ULTIMATE

The new lighting effects in this stage silhouette the characters, adding drama to the action.

PHANTASY STAR ONLINE III: C.A.R.D. REVOLUTION



Using an Enemy deck allows you to call in reinforcements to fight for you, though it also makes you much weaker in terms of defence.

SONIC TEAM'S LUCK LIES IN THE CARDS

DETAILS
FORMAT: GameCube
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: SEGA
DEVELOPER: Sonic Team
RELEASE: TBA '04 (Japan: Out Now)
GENRE: Strategy
PLAYERS: 1-4

Less about running around dungeons and more about using your head to come out on top. It's not exactly what you were expecting, eh?

As open-minded as we try to be about new games, we have to admit to having pre-playtest doubts about Sonic Team's latest entry in the *Phantasy Star Online* chronicle. Not that playing the game improved matters, you understand. We've certainly got a better idea of how the game works, and as strategy games go it's looking to be a relatively good one, but we're still concerned that people might come to *PSO III* expecting something more familiar.

The fact is, anyone picking up this game off the back of loving the last two games should brace themselves for shock, disappointment or perhaps even both. The trick is to forget everything you already know about *PSO* and instead get ready for a game that's about as far from the formula of the previous titles as you could possibly get – something that, while confusing, doesn't come as too much of a surprise considering Sonic Team's constant attempts to reinvent its past titles.

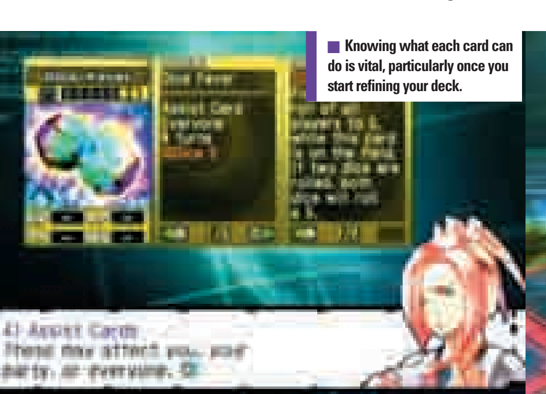
Coming across as some kind of hybrid between *Advance Wars*, *Dynasty Tactics* and *Yu-Gi-Oh! The Duelists Of The Roses*,

"THIS IS ABOUT AS FAR FROM THE PHANTASY STAR ONLINE FORMULA AS YOU COULD POSSIBLY GET"

PSO III is a game that requires some mastery before you can truly appreciate what it's doing. Creating a character à la *PSO* and picking one of two decks – Item or Enemy, depending on how you want to play – isn't tough, and while you'll initially be completely confused by the action, it's actually fairly simple to grasp.

Taking it in turns to attack, what you can do is limited by dice throws taken at the beginning of your go; the higher the number, the more points you can spend on prepping cards (either through equipping items or summoning monsters), moving and attacking. Once you've spent all your points, you draw more cards and then end your turn, with the ultimate aim being to wipe out your opponent's Life Points. So far, so simple, even if it doesn't look it at first.

Of course, while *PSO III* doesn't seem to be as horribly complex as some may have predicted, we're still in two minds as to whether it's the kind of game that SEGA needs to be releasing over here. With the real-world e-Card equivalent of the game looking doubtful for a release outside Japan, and only a GameCube release planned for this title, we've got a nasty feeling that this one could sink without trace – no matter how good the finished game turns out to be.



Knowing what each card can do is vital, particularly once you start refining your deck.



Imbue weapons with Life Points and direct attacks won't harm you when you use one.


eMag

THE SIMS 2



"THE STRATEGY OF PLAYING SIMS ACROSS A LIFETIME GIVES PLAYERS A DEEPER AND MORE REALISTIC EXPERIENCE"
WILL WRIGHT, LEAD DESIGNER, MAXIS

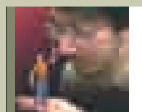
VIDEOGAMES MATHS

WHO NEEDS THE REAL WORLD?

THE SIMS - GROUNDHOG DAY x REAL LIFE = THE SIMS 2

A huge selection of animations and expressions depict far more individual personalities for each Sim.

How Sims deal with those crucial teenage years will have a big effect on the adults they become.



CREATOR PROFILE

After developing C64 helicopter action title *Raid On Bungeling Bay* in 1984, Will Wright realised that building the levels was actually more fun than flying around them. In 1987 he founded Maxis Studios with Jeff Braun and in 1989 his city-building game idea became reality in the legendary *Sim City*.

HISTORY

- **SIM CITY 4** 2003 [PC]
- **THE SIMS** 2000 [PC]
- **SIM CITY** 1989 [PC, Amiga]

IT'S A SANDBOX LIFE, FOR US, IT'S A SANDBOX LIFE, FOR US…

Those gamers yet to fall under the spell of Maxis' ingenious life simulation *The Sims* may still be baffled at how a game that involves such menial tasks as sending people to the toilet and making sure they wash their hands afterwards could become the best-selling PC title of all time. The simple truth is that nothing quite captures the imagination like everyday life and, as freeform gaming goes, no other concept comes close to the blank canvas of possibilities offered by Maxis' sandbox masterpiece. Do I get up in time to shower before work or shall I have that extra half hour in bed? Should I cook tonight or call out for pizza? Can I be bothered to do that workout when I get home or could I do with a night in front of the telly? Every decision allows you to sculpt the life you've always wanted, experiment with the boundaries of human cruelty, or weave each character's story into your very own soap opera.

Although we go back to the original game time and time again to find its engrossing charm and mind-blowing scope as enduring as ever, four years down the line (and a couple of expansion packs too far) the outdated visual style tends to undermine the game's core strength of immersing players in the lives of their Sims. Finally, however, the game engine is undergoing its first complete overhaul since its 2000 debut; and from what we've seen of Maxis' efforts so far, the sequel is looking to break just as much new ground as its earth-shattering predecessor.

Deservedly having the full extent of today's cutting-edge technological capabilities lavished on the project, the world of *The Sims* has been brought to life like never before. The stunning graphics engine introduces a whole new level of realism to the rich 3D environments, which can now be freely panned and zoomed to your requirements. This wonderfully cinematic perspective enables you to fully appreciate the incredible new attention to detail on display as, for the first time, you to experience life in the household you've created from the same viewpoint as your Sims.



The glorious new 3D graphics and zoomable camera put you right there in the house with your Sims. Great.

The characters themselves will benefit from vastly improved AI, enabling them to call upon a massively expanded repertoire of context-sensitive actions to far better create the illusion that you're dealing with virtual people rather than a bunch of sprites. Their skeletons will be properly articulated to allow for a more authentic range of movements, while facial expressions will combine with intricate postural changes to better depict mood and personality.

Certainly the most ambitious step towards bringing the Sims to life, however, has to be the addition of mortality and consequence into the equation. There'll be no more groundhog days as your Sims now pass through six distinct stages of life between cradle and grave, while their experiences and actions are remembered from one day to the next, moulding them into distinctly individual beings. Personality, behaviour and even body shape evolve as a direct consequence of their actions, inviting players to become much more attached to their unique creations.

With such a fabulously immersive degree of realism breathed into the lives of the Sims, expect to be amazed by how far the concept has progressed.

"A SIM'S PERSONALITY, BEHAVIOUR AND EVEN BODY SHAPE WILL EVOLVE AS A DIRECT CONSEQUENCE OF THEIR ACTIONS"

DETAILS

FORMAT: PC
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: EA
DEVELOPER: Maxis
RELEASE: Q3 '04
GENRE: Life Simulation
PLAYERS: 1

The Sims get their first makeover in four years, bringing them to life with enticing new levels of realism.

SIMZ 'N' THE 'HOOD

Your Sims' neighbourhoods have had some intensive renovation for *The Sims 2*. No longer will characters be confined to a set layout of generic lots; thanks to compatibility with *Sim City 4*'s landscape editing tool each area can be shaped to your own designs. Residential and community plots can be tailored to any size, allowing you to create closely-knit housing estates, small village centres or sprawling downtown districts. Proximity will also affect how regularly friends visit, so expect your neighbours to become a familiar sight.

OTOGI: HYAKKI TOUBATSU EMAKI

IF AT FIRST YOU DON'T SUCCEED, THEN SLASH, SLASH AGAIN…



Because models use as few polygons as possible, From Software has been able to display many characters on screen at once.

If you're having problems with the full title of From Software's latest Xbox title (which in Japanese describes the demon-slaying nature of the game), this is basically *Otogi 2* with the original game thrown in for good measure. Of course, most of us missed *Otogi* when SEGA published it last September, but in Japan the first game was fairly successful. And rightly so – with its oriental styling, tidy front end, and solid hack-and-slash gameplay, the title brought something a little different to Microsoft's otherwise Western line-up of games.

Like its predecessor, *Otogi 2* is broken up into missions that involve destroying supernatural beasts or specific relics that are highlighted in the briefing at the start of each level. As before, weapons can be bought and sold between missions, and this time there's even more variety thanks to the five new playable characters, bringing the total up to six. Thankfully, the core gameplay hasn't really changed; attack combos are easily achieved, though not to the extent that things feel overly basic. Seeing as much of the game's structure revolves around exploration and aerial gymnastics, the simplistic combat complements the rest of the action rather than overcomplicating it.

Aside from the gameplay, players will undoubtedly be most impressed by the visuals, which have been refined since the last game. Much of the scenery is destructible and, while the visual effects were impressive the first time around, demolishing *Otogi 2*'s ancient buildings and suchlike results in some of the most jaw-dropping explosions to date; clouds of dust spiral into the air as rubble crumbles to the ground, and the light from Japanese lanterns is diffused by the misty night air. Such atmospheric styling stands out among the Hollywood movie tie-ins and underworld-themed titles that seem to dominate the charts right now.

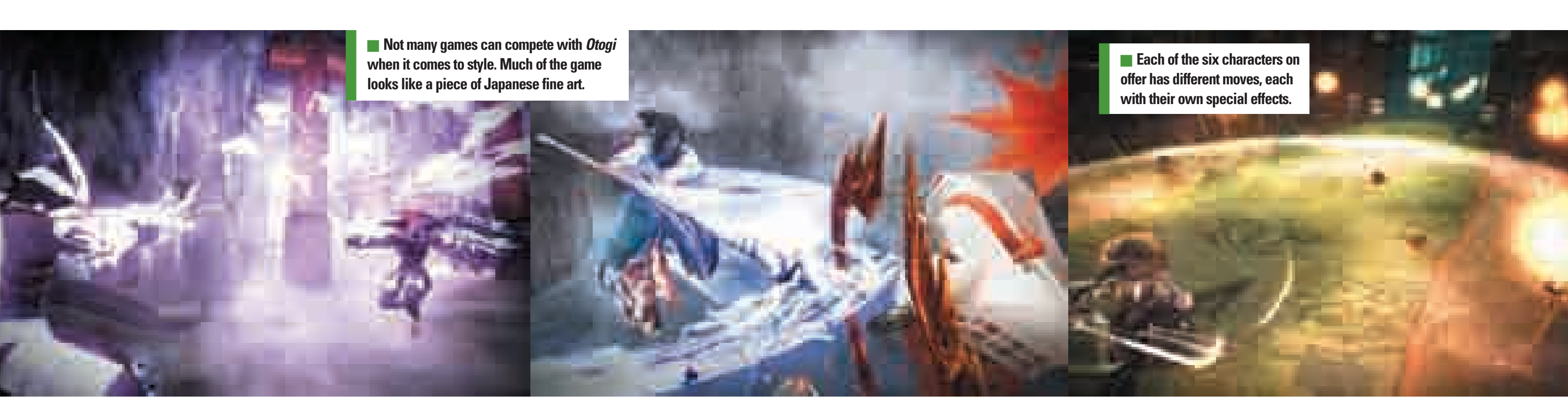
We just hope that *Otogi 2* gets a UK release. After SEGA failed to shift copies of the original it's unclear whether publishers will be interested in the follow-up. Of course, with *Ninja Gaiden* due on Microsoft's console this spring, perhaps Tecmo's oriental offering will whet the appetites of European Xbox owners.

"THE SIMPLISTIC COMBAT COMPLEMENTS THE ACTION RATHER THAN COMPLICATING IT"

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: From Software
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: TBA (Japan: Out Now, US: TBA)
GENRE: Adventure
PLAYERS: 1

Otogi 2 is a hack-and-slash adventure but with fancy aerial gymnastics. Nice.

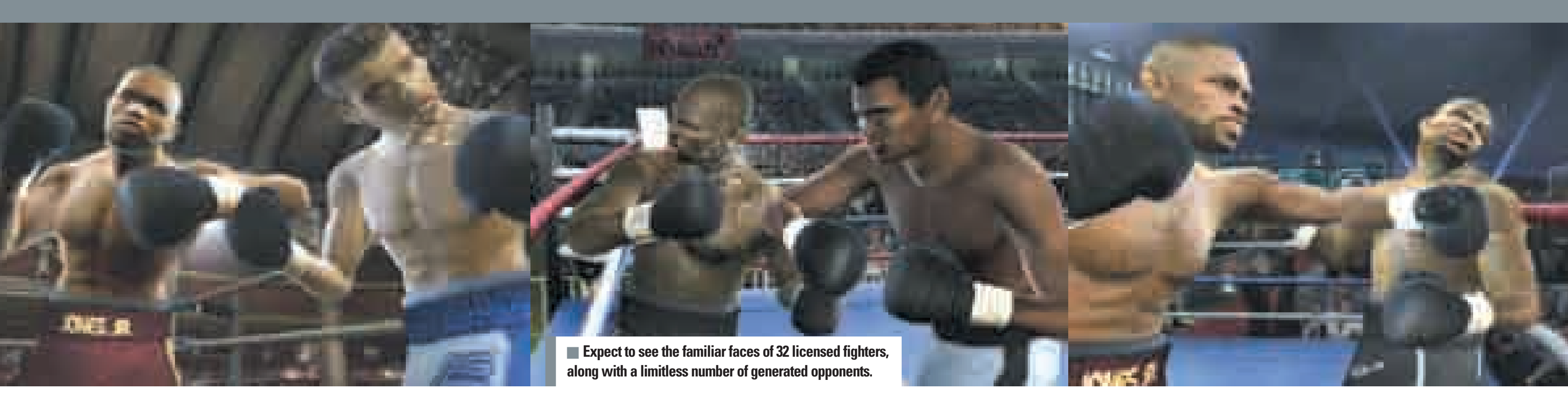


Not many games can compete with *Otogi* when it comes to style. Much of the game looks like a piece of Japanese fine art.

Each of the six characters on offer has different moves, each with their own special effects.


eMag

FIGHT NIGHT 2004



Expect to see the familiar faces of 32 licensed fighters, along with a limitless number of generated opponents.

EA PREPARES TO CHEW THE EAR OFF THE COMPETITION

DETAILS

FORMAT: PlayStation2, Xbox
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: EA Sports
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: Q2 '04
GENRE: Sports
PLAYERS: 1-2 (PS2 Online)

EA steps into the ring with a new control system and physics engine that could redefine the boxing genre.

PS2

As EA's *Knockout Kings* franchise finally hangs up its gloves after a long, yet somewhat mediocre, career in the ring, the Don King of the videogame world already has a hot new protégé waiting in the wings that may well possess the upper-cutting edge to reach heights its predecessor could only dream of. As huge fans of the sport we've been understandably disappointed at how every boxing title to surface over the years has fallen some way short of capturing any of the thrills and finely honed skills involved in a world-class bout, but *Fight Night 2004* promises to revolutionise gameplay in the genre with its unique 'Total Punch Control' system.

While the majority of recent box-'em-ups typically furnish players with a repertoire of pre-scripted punches configured to each button (and one or two devastating special blows upon which your success ultimately hinges), EA has acknowledged how the resultant button-mashing action not only fails to pack a satisfying punch but also tends to run out of steam incredibly quickly. Realising the genre had to find one heck of a second wind if it was to stage an unlikely comeback, the familiar *KO Kings* interface has been completely stripped away and rebuilt from scratch to more effectively recreate the true fluidity and precision the fighting art is all about.

Using the right analogue stick to guide the movement of your character's fists through the air, players should be able to deliver the blow they want more intuitively and authentically than ever before. Holding the R1 or L1 button will switch the analogue control to your guard and body movement respectively, allowing you to float around the ring like a butterfly before stinging like a bee from the perfect angle. Add a complex physics engine that accurately depicts the effect of your shots without any sign of those tediously scripted bodily reactions we're used to, and EA assures us that no two knockouts will ever be the same.

A more dynamic Career mode and even customisable ring entrances add some attractive padding, but it's the unique thumbstick-wrecking gameplay that we can't wait to get to grips with on the canvas.

"FIGHT NIGHT 2004 HAS PROMISED TO REVOLUTIONISE GAMEPLAY IN THE BOX-'EM-UP GENRE WITH ITS UNIQUE 'TOTAL PUNCH CONTROL' SYSTEM"



In the Career mode rankings aren't static but will feature retirements and newcomers breaking into the big time.


eMag

SILENT HILL 4: THE ROOM

BACK BEHIND THE SOFA WITH YOU – SILENT HILL HAS RETURNED

PS2 **At Konami's press unveiling for 2004 last month, there was only one series on everyone's lips.** Okay, if you count *Metal Gear Solid* then there were two, but that would ruin this introduction wouldn't it? Yes, it was the company's horror masterpiece *Silent Hill* that we wanted to learn more about. The rumours have been flying around for months; would the game reunite us with characters from previous titles or would it be an all-new scenario? Where could the series go without repeating itself? And, most importantly, just how much more twisted and horrific could the creatures that inhabit this dark world become?

As the lights went down and we were plunged into the darkness of *Silent Hill 4: The Room* it all became clear – Konami is not content to rest upon its laurels. This looks and feels like the most disturbing horror game not only in the series, but in the history of next-generation titles. An exaggeration? We don't think so, just look at the screenshots for proof of this title's nauseatingly oppressive feel.

As with previous *Silent Hill* games, *The Room* mixes in-your-face shocks that make you jump out of your skin with some deeply disturbing psychological scares when you know you're being pursued but you can't quite make out who or what is doing the chasing. Once again there are maniacal creatures – we saw flashes of some kind of baby/dog hybrids as well as monsters seemingly made out of nothing but ether floating through the air. It is this that possibly gives *Silent Hill* the edge over the *Resident Evil* series; zombies we can handle, but some sort of shaking entity without a face is a far scarier proposition.

Silent Hill 4: The Room dispenses with the female touch of the third instalment and introduces us to Henry Townshend who, as the story unfolds, finds himself trapped in his apartment without reason or hope of escape. It seems that the flat has been cursed by an unknown force, and just when it looks like Townshend is destined to remain here forever he discovers strange portals dotted around. These lead into alternate worlds which could be the answer to Henry's prayers, or might just lead him further into hell. Each portal contains creatures that you must defeat, and they get significantly nastier the further into the world of *The Room* you travel. As with the first three games, there are also a number of fiendish puzzles to try and solve if you want to gain all the answers needed to escape from this nightmare.

Silent Hill 4: The Room is as much about what you don't see as what you do, with the programmers once again making full use of some beautifully rendered environments as well as ensuring that the sound of the game is as important as the graphics. In addition to the telltale noise of possible impending doom, there's also a booming soundtrack that sends shivers up your spine and piles on the intensity throughout.

The magic with *Silent Hill 4: The Room* is that veterans of the series are in no better a position than gamers who haven't tried any of the three previous instalments – everyone is on an even footing as you are plunged straight into the confusion and distress of Henry Townshend, and the only way to discover the truth is to face your deepest fears and see just what's lurking in the dark.

With this and *Resident Evil Outbreak* out this year, survival horror fans shouldn't expect to get much sleep. Carry on screaming, indeed…

DETAILS

FORMAT: PS2, Xbox
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Konami
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: TBA
GENRE: Survival Horror
PLAYERS: 1

Step back inside the chilling world of Silent Hill with a new cast of humans and grotesque creatures.

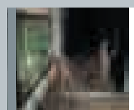
INSIDE MY HEAD

The biggest change in the new *Silent Hill* fright-fest is the introduction of first-person sections. At first we were sceptical about this – we've all seen what happened when *Resident Evil* tried it, right? Yet Konami is sensible enough not to mess with things too much. These sections only come into play when our hero is in his apartment. Once you journey to the outer realms of Silent Hill, the game returns to its usual viewpoint.

"SILENT HILL 4 MIXES IN-YOUR-FACE SHOCKS WITH SOME DEEPLY DISTURBING PSYCHOLOGICAL SCARES"



Further evidence that we're dealing with one of the most disturbing games ever…



SERIES PROFILE

The first *Silent Hill* took the PSone by storm and since then Konami has been coming up with more and more horrifying tales. The previous instalment was released just last year, so this sort of twisted tale obviously comes easy to the Japanese developer now…

HISTORY

- **SILENT HILL 3** 2003 [Multi]
- **SILENT HILL 2** 2002 [Multi]
- **SILENT HILL** 2001 [PSone]

Normal rules don't apply in *Silent Hill*. If a character wants to silently float through the air, they'll damn well do it.

"A ROSTER OF MACABRE AND MISSHAPEN MONSTERS CONTRIBUTE TO ONE OF THE SCARIEST GAMES YOU WILL EVER PLAY"
KONAMI PRESS RELEASE

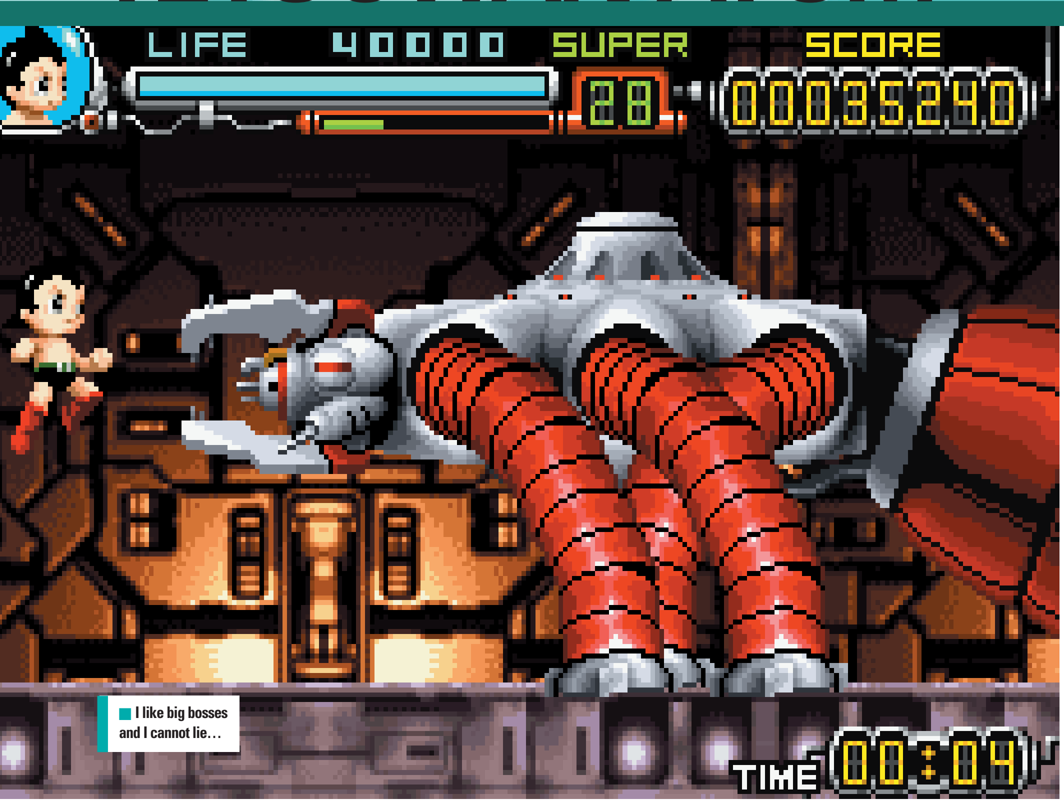
VIDEOGAMES MATHS

MAKING SENSE OF SILENT HILL 4

RESIDENT EVIL - ZOMBIES + NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD = SILENT HILL 4

It's this sort of grotesque horror that's sure to earn the game an 18 certificate from the BBFC.

ASTROBOY: TETSUWAN ATOM



I like big bosses and I cannot lie…

LIKE YOUR GAMES FRANTIC AND BIZARRE? TRY THIS…

DETAILS

FORMAT: Game Boy Advance
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: SEGA
DEVELOPER: Hitmaker
RELEASE: TBA (Japan: Out Now)
GENRE: Adventure
PLAYERS: 1

An iconic figure in Japan, it's amazing to think that the export potential of the *Astroboy* series has never been realised. Until now, anyway…

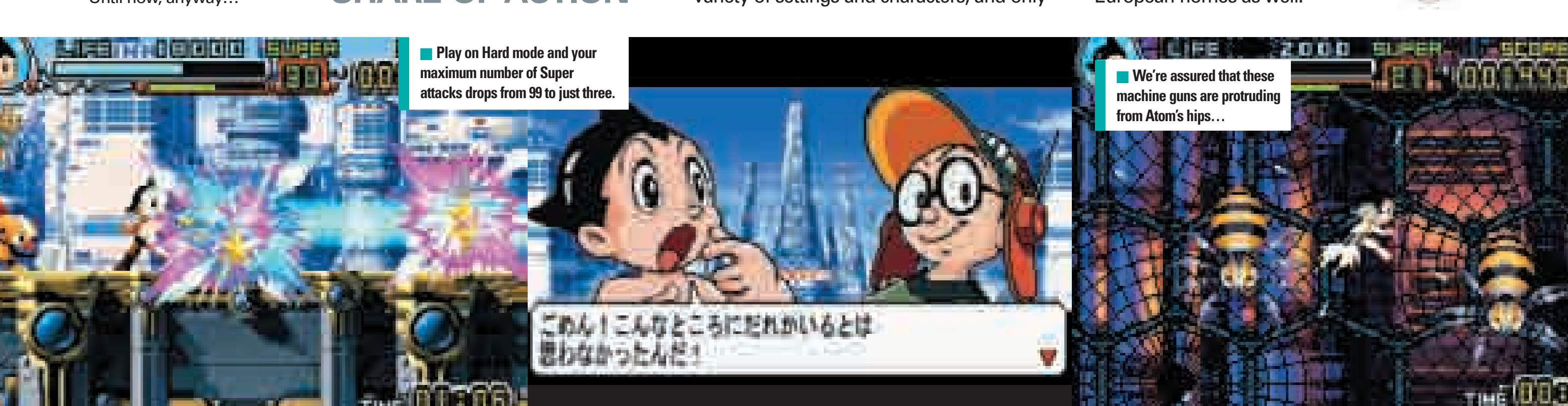
"AS INAPPROPRIATELY DRESSED AS HE MAY BE FOR IT, ATOM SEES MORE THAN HIS FAIR SHARE OF ACTION"

***Astroboy* is an odd one and no mistake.** To the untrained eye, this is a side-scrolling adventure in which the bizarre cast of heroes and villains lay waste to one another with flurries of blows, lasers and curiously-placed machine guns. It might not sound like much, but the game's basis in a popular Japanese anime series and comic gives a greater degree of substance to the insanity. Skipping from scrolling shooter to wandering beat-'em-up seemingly at will, *Astroboy* uses a huge variety of settings and characters, and only by meeting up with the whole cast will our hero, Atom, reach his full potential.

For the best idea of what to expect from the under-dressed youngster, you'll have to journey back to some of the highlights of the 16-bit era. The fact that Treasure is involved in this project is evident from the off, with various sections bearing more than a passing resemblance to classics such as *Mischief Makers* and *Gunstar Heroes* (particularly the boss-heavy structure, which too many modern games avoid). Nevertheless, *Astroboy* survives better on its own merits than on fond memories, seamlessly blending genres with its own quirky style and ingenuity. The strength of titles like these makes us wonder why the genre is often overlooked even on the last real bastion of 2D gaming, the GBA.

Visually, you'll be hard-pressed to find a game working harder than this SEGA/ Treasure collaboration, and from the opening of the first level as the camera pans down through a bustling cityscape you know that this unlikely partnership has done the Nintendo hardware proud. Fluid animation and solid connection round off the package, making for one of the prettiest handheld games in years, and considering it plays just as well as it looks, you know you're in for an absolute treat. The question is, though, *are* we in for a treat?

The TV series is set to debut in the US shortly, presumably with the game being released to coincide with this. With so many digital channels over here playing similar niche programmes, we can but hope the same crazy animation/ game combo finds its way into European homes as well.



Play on Hard mode and your maximum number of Super attacks drops from 99 to just three.

We're assured that these machine guns are protruding from Atom's hips…


eMag

EVERQUEST II



"THROUGH PAIN AND POWER, CHAOS WILL SEAR THE WORLD, AND OUT OF THE ASH THE MERCILESS, THE FIERCE AND THE VISIONARY WILL RISE AND RULE"

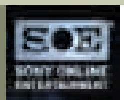
WWW.EVERQUEST2.COM

As artificial as it may look, there's still something beautiful about *EverQuest's* new look.

The plentiful local fauna is as impressive as the environments it inhabits.

EVERQUEST II

PC



DEVELOPER PROFILE

Focusing primarily on its PC output, Sony's online wing has given us some of the defining multiplayer experiences of recent years. It has also become the market leader in its field, presumably due at least in part to the overwhelming success of its *EverQuest* franchise.

HISTORY

- **STAR WARS GALAXIES** 2003 [PC]
- **PLANETSIDE** 2003 [PC]
- **EVERQUEST** 1999 [PC]



The Owlbear has the head of an owl and the body of a bear. Genius.

However nice you may be, it's all to easy to fall in with a bad crowd…

JUST WHEN YOU THOUGHT YOU'D KICKED THE HABIT…

If you explain the concept behind *EverQuest* to somebody, chances are a non-believer will give you a blank stare and remind you that you're never going to get those 800 hours of your life back. Even showing them the game is likely to merely confuse or annoy. Fact is, if you're the sort of gamer who gets their kicks from teaming up with other fantasy-based characters online and slaying all manner of nasties, you'll already have fallen into *EverQuest*'s (or one of its online brethren's) well-laid trap. With the original game set to continue running online for the foreseeable future this isn't a case of 'buy in or get out', and while players new to the franchise will no doubt want to start in the most up-to-date version, it's going to be hard for veterans to let go of their cherished Dwarves and Elves.

As any MMORPG fanatic will tell you, the genre is not famed for its good looks. Many try to win you over with lavish character creation and a snazzy front end only to have the main game (where you'll be spending hundreds of hours) pale in comparison, but to its credit *EverQuest II* looks as though it should join the elite few whose looks are as polished as their content is expansive. On the subject of character creation, though, SOE has taken some bold steps to open up the game to a wider array of players and ensure you're pleased with your choice of profession.

"YOUR CHARACTER CAN NOW CLIMB TO LEVEL 100 WITH HINTS THAT FUTURE UPDATES MAY ALLOW FURTHER PROGRESSION"

At the start of the game you'll select a race and gender before tweaking your digital avatar as you choose – what you won't have to do is get bogged down in statistics or important class choices before you even start playing. Instead, you're presented with a choice of five much broader categories – Fighter, Mage, Priest, Scout and Artisan – with your final class determined by your decisions as you progress through the epic adventure.

It's a combination of minor improvements and adjustments rather than a few huge shake-ups that will really improve the *EverQuest II* experience. The fact that day turning to night will actually have a bearing on the game – affecting which creatures will be out hunting, certain classes and even varying the potential of spells – shows this tweaking in action, as does the fact that characters really do show their age as you waste away behind a keyboard for hundreds of hours. That's not to say there aren't a few larger alterations and, as we've already mentioned, the class system has been revamped, as has levelling up which is now apparently a simpler process. Just as well really, since your character can now climb to Level 100 with hints that future updates may allow further progression as far as Level 200 or even above. Just don't go expecting five-figure statistics of *Disgaea* proportions.

It's quite evident that SOE knows what it did well (and less well) in the hugely popular *Star Wars Galaxies* and is putting this knowledge to work for one of the most important PC sequels in years. There are still a few months left to iron out any creases and, much like other titles in the genre, you can guarantee that updates and tweaks will be being made well after the game hits the shelves.

All being well we should be battling our way into the beta test over the coming months and we'll update you on anything this active involvement reveals. Provided we can actually tear ourselves away from a monitor and a keyboard for long enough, that is…

ALL TOGETHER NOW

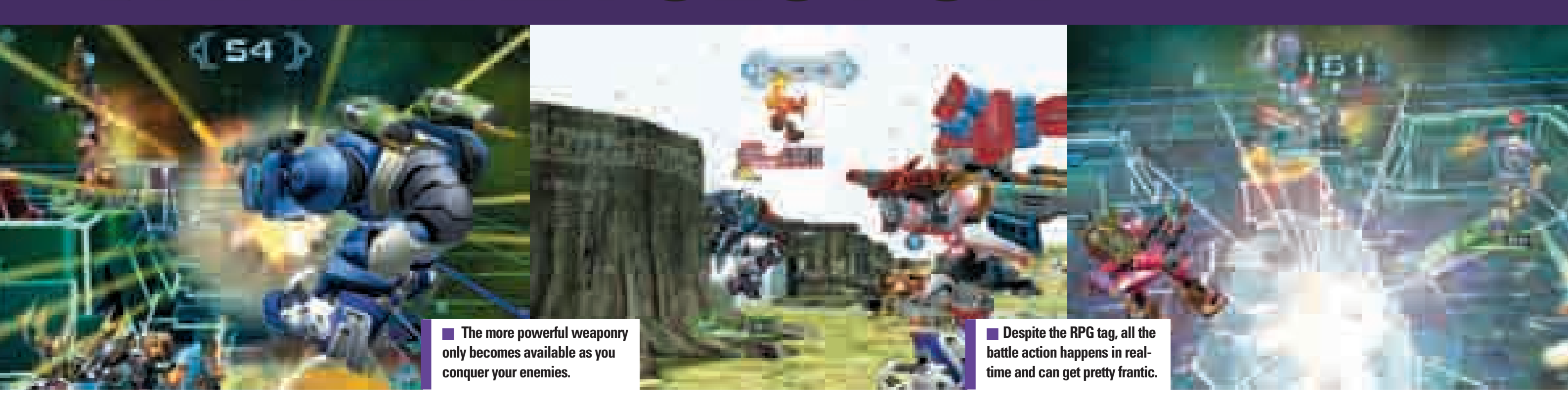
A major change to the way the game will function is the new raft of advantages of partying up and going into battle. Different classes will bring their own unique talents to the adventure, so recruit a Scout to lead the way and help keep enemies at bay, or hire a Magician to protect the group with a magical barrier. Better still, groups will have access to a host of team-up attacks – a bunch of melee combatants will be able to work together to pin down a foe while Mages can combine their powers to unleash devastating combo spells. Given the social nature of *EverQuest* this should make sure that whoever, wherever and even whatever you are, there will always be an accommodating party out there waiting for you.

DETAILS

FORMAT: PC
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Ubisoft
DEVELOPER: Sony Online Entertainment
RELEASE: June '04
GENRE: MMORPG
PLAYERS: 1-TBC

The online phenomenon returns to wow gamers all over again. If the original was 'digital crack', we hate to think what manner of contraband this will constitute…

CUSTOM ROBO BATTLE REVOLUTION



The more powerful weaponry only becomes available as you conquer your enemies.

Despite the RPG tag, all the battle action happens in real-time and can get pretty frantic.

WE'RE STILL WAITING FOR THE SPARE PARTS TO ARRIVE…

If robots with guns are cool, then logic suggests that smaller robots with bigger guns are even cooler; particularly if you have them kick seven shades of engine oil out of one another. Thankfully, that's exactly what Nintendo's robot smash-'em-up game *Custom Robo Battle Revolution* appears to offer. But despite the slightly childish style of the super-deformed robots on show, the game isn't nearly as immature as you might think.

Set on an unknown planet and starring an unnamed hero (yes, Nintendo certainly has a knack for holding back details), the slightly convoluted premise of *Custom Robo* – robots controlled by brainwaves, autonomous robotic enemy, secret past of the planet, blah, blah – belies the game's simplicity. With the roaming RPG elements helping to bind the action stages together, the crux of the game lies in creating your very own custom robot from over 200 different parts and weapons, giving you unique strengths and abilities over your opponents.

Once you're happy with your creation, it's off to the battle arena where you can duke it out with other robots – up to four of which can appear in an arena at any one time – in an all-out firefight. Win and you'll be able to salvage parts of your opponents to use as upgrades for your own robot; and with some crazy add-ons and weapons available, the only thing limiting how your robot looks is your imagination.

While these screenshots might lead some people to brand *Custom Robo* as '*Virtual On* for kids', doing so would just undermine the sheer addictiveness of being able to create, destroy and then re-create tooled-up robots, all in the space of a single game. Indeed, the single-screen action of the multiplayer game (as opposed to the split-screen style that most people are used to when playing games with friends), combined with the madcap pace of the action, makes the game more comparable to Capcom's *Power Stone* series rather than most other mecha titles.

Of course, the best news we've heard so far is that the GameCube version of *Custom Robo* is going to be an entirely new title. This is great, as it means we're not getting conned with a hasty remake. Even though the two original N64 games never officially made it out of Japan, Nintendo isn't planning to try to port them onto the Cube and hope that no-one notices.

All we can hope for now is that the heady mix of frantic robot-bashing action, story-led RPG elements and almost *Pokémon*-esque way of finding machine parts that can be used to upgrade your robot proves popular with the GameCube crowd. After all, *Power Stone* with miniature mecha can't be all bad…

DETAILS

FORMAT: GameCube
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Nintendo
DEVELOPER: Noise
RELEASE: TBA '04 (Japan: Out Now, US: TBA '04)
GENRE: Action RPG
PLAYERS: 1-4

Nintendo finally brings the *Custom Robo* series out of Japan, complete with all its frantic robotic fighting and tasty customising goodness.

"WE'D CALL CUSTOM ROBO 'VIRTUAL ON FOR KIDS', BUT THAT WOULD UNDERMINE ITS ADDICTIVENESS"



With so many parts, weapons and colours, making a unique robot is as easy as mecha pie.


eMag

SUIKODEN IV



As with the previous titles, don't go expecting a generic set of goblins and orcs to beat up.

We've seen some fantastic weapons in our time but the pink and yellow comedy hammer is definitely way up there.

PART FOUR ALREADY? BUT WE HAVEN'T HAD THE THIRD ONE YET…

DETAILS
FORMAT: PlayStation2
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Konami
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: Q4 '04
GENRE: RPG
PLAYERS: 1

The series that kickstarted the PSone RPG boom returns to entertain PAL gamers again. Hope you haven't got any plans…

PS2 **It's not uncommon for the PAL market to be 'late to the party' in a gaming sense and we're often introduced to a series halfway through (or even later in some cases).** Just look at *Final Fantasy*, *Three Kingdoms* and *Front Mission* to name but a few. What's much less common, though, is for us to miss out on a title in the middle of a string of games. It seems odd that Konami would force PAL gamers to miss an entire instalment of the series – *Suikoden III* – but this was apparently blamed on translation issues that would have required total recoding to overcome.

This has always been slightly questionable but we've been promised that this fourth game in the series is being programmed to specifically avoid this problem. How this will affect game save continuations (completed *Suikoden* saves could be carried over to the second game, likewise from the second to the third) remains to be seen but we can only hope this is not something we'll miss out on.

Set 150 years before the first *Suikoden*, this game will follow many of the same rules that the series has laid down – travel the world in search of Runes while expanding your forces to include the 108 Stars Of Destiny. This time around, the narrative is centred on the Rune Of Punishment, another of the True Runes that find themselves at the heart of the series. This one in particular grants the bearer extraordinary strength at the expense of sapping their life over time, moving on to a new host when its bearer is slain. Worse still, a by-product of this augmentation is that the chosen one is haunted by fragmented memories of the Rune's fallen users. Naturally, the hero of this adventure is the one selected by the Rune, making its purpose and usage an important issue in the narrative.

One aspect of the third game that frustrated some players was the battle system – with six party members fighting in pairs, the system was unique if a touch limiting. Suffice to say that as with most RPG franchises, *Suikoden* is reliant on its existing fanbase for the majority of its sales, and if enough fans don't like the way something is going you can expect it to change. This is a rule proved by the exception of the 108 Stars Of Destiny; while it's easy to become attached to at least a few of the characters, only a few of the cast ever make it into more than one of the games. Be it down to time periods, locations or just a will to keep the characters fresh and original, we'll just have to wait and see who we get to command this time.

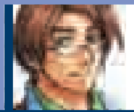
Under the watchful gaze of director Masayuki Saruta (a *Suikoden* newcomer whose past credits include *Shadow Of Memories* and the *Contra* games), and with much of the original production staff on board, the popular series continues to evolve and expand the *Suikoden* universe. We're not sure how well-received the game will be considering the omission of its predecessor (unless some announcement is made in the meantime concerning its belated release) but the fact that it's actually coming to Europe is a good sign for future releases.

We're still holding out for the possible returns of Fu Su Lu, Viktor and the mighty Gadget Z in some shape or form but it's looking less and less likely all the time…

TWO IF BY SEA

Much like *The Wind Waker*'s watery expanses, *Suikoden IV*'s map will be made up of many small islands that you can journey between. To this end, you'll be able to enlist the services of various sailing vessels, and while the details of these sections are scarce, the potential is huge. Imagine your ship acting like a smaller version of your HQ, housing the more nautical 108 Stars Of Destiny and allowing them to help you out by offering their services or opening up shops on board. Better still, we'd like to see a *Skies Of Arcadia*-style crew system, allowing you to assign characters to various duties, if only to see the more aristocratic Stars swabbing the deck and splicing the main brace. Then there's scope for sea battles, exploration, pirate encounters… We can dream, right?

"SUIKODEN IV'S MAP WILL BE MADE UP OF MANY SMALL ISLANDS THAT THE PLAYER CAN JOURNEY BETWEEN AT WILL"



PRODUCER PROFILE

Noritada Matsukawa has worked his way up through the ranks of Konami, from being involved in single elements such as sound and design in the 16-bit era to being responsible for one of its most popular franchises today.

HISTORY

- **SUIKODEN III** 2002 [PlayStation2]
- **AZURE DREAMS** 1999 [PSone]
- **TOKIMEKI MEMORIAL** 1996 [SNES]

"SUIKODEN IV IS CERTAIN TO BE ONE OF THE MOST ENGROSSING AND VARIED ROLE-PLAYING GAMES OF THE COMING YEAR"
KONAMI PRESS RELEASE

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

SUIKODEN IV: BEHIND THE STATISTICS

SUIKODEN III + SKIES OF ARCADIA - PIRATES = SUIKODEN IV

Any game that features dancing cats is okay in our book, and what a book that is.

DEAD MAN'S HAND



The much-touted ragdoll physics really do make for some very satisfying death animations.

WELL, I'M PACKING UP MY GAME AND I'M A HEAD OUT WEST

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox
OTHER FORMATS: PC
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Atari
DEVELOPER: Human Head Studios
RELEASE: 26 March
GENRE: Shoot-'em-up
PLAYERS: 1 (1-TBC online)

Six shooters and silly hats all round as Human Head takes us back to the Old West for some good old-fashioned gunplay. Spaghetti comes as standard, Shania Twain optional.

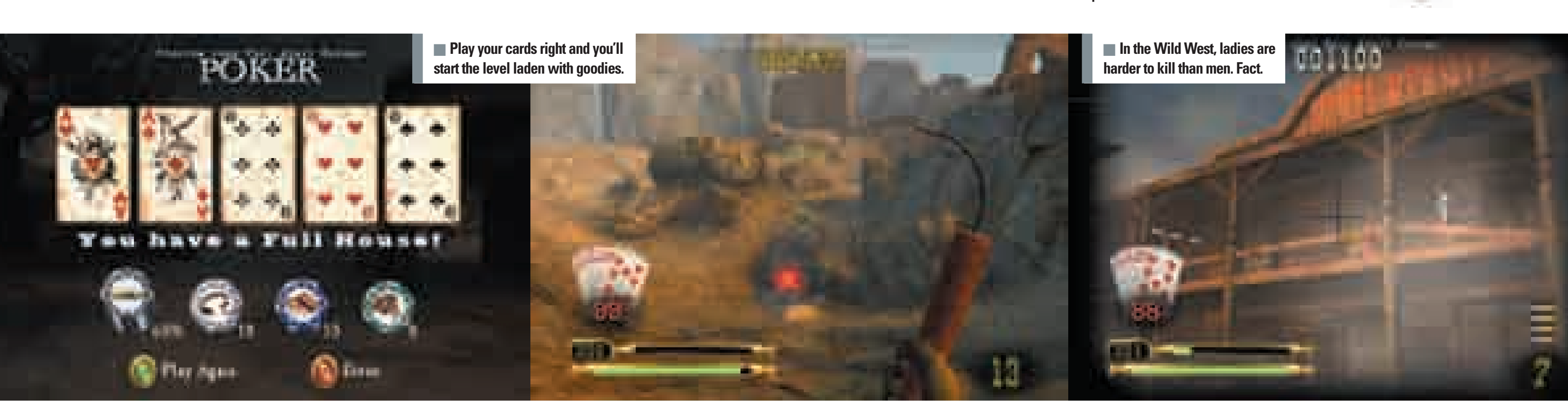
With so many shooters arguing over which can showcase the best squad AI or the most destructible environments it's refreshing that there are still those that would serve up what's best described as an 'old-school' experience. *Dead Man's Hand* is just that – there are no delusions of grandeur or boasts that won't make it as far as the shelves here, just good old-fashioned shooting. Of course, it takes an extremely accomplished title to pull off such a feat of simplicity, and while the likes of *Super Monkey Ball* have proved that it's still possible to make a whole game out of a minimal concept, an 'almost' like *Serious Sam* shows how hard it can be to hold attention.

Back in the Wild West, a grounding in realism means that El Tejon (the wisecracking lead) won't be getting his hands on any lasers or plasma grenades. You'll just have some pistols, rifles and shotguns plus the odd stick of dynamite for special occasions. The more potent end of your arsenal can be used to blow up selected parts of the scenery (as in the *Red Faction* games), with the demolition often culminating in bonus points for particularly impressive kills. It's these possibilities combined with all manner of trick shots and combo shots that will score points in Atari's favour. In addition, the 'boss' encounters that follow many of the levels (showdowns with your former posse) are wonderfully executed from the flickering black and white intro to the oh-so-predictable finale with the good guy walking off into the sunset.

There are all manner of quirks and ideas lurking in *Dead Man's Hand* – from the opening few hands of pre-level poker to determine your starting stats and equipment to the library of suitably hammy one-liners, we'll never let it be said that Human Head's latest effort doesn't have a unique feel. The pessimist in us can't help but bring up the repetitive nature of much of the gameplay, but the 'moseying on into town on horseback, claiming on a few Wanted posters and riding off into the sunset' genre is both enjoyable and under-represented.

It shouldn't be long before we get our hands on a finished build and find out just what awaits this outlaw: wealth and notoriety or a one-way trip to the gallows? The jury (or indeed posse) is still out on this one.

> "TECHNICAL MATTERS TAKE A BACK SEAT TO SHEER ENJOYMENT – A RISKY MOVE IN TODAY'S FICKLE INDUSTRY"



Play your cards right and you'll start the level laden with goodies.

In the Wild West, ladies are harder to kill than men. Fact.


eMag

STARCRAFT: GHOST



The compulsory stealth elements are here with a range of sneaky moves.

You'll face a variety of space beasts, but your weapons are up to it.

"STARCRAFT: GHOST WILL GIVE PLAYERS AN OPPORTUNITY TO EXPERIENCE THE UNIVERSE FROM A COMPLETELY NEW PERSPECTIVE"

MIKE MORHAIME, PRESIDENT, BLIZZARD ENTERTAINMENT



DEVELOPER PROFILE

Founded in 1994, Blizzard made a name for itself by developing the *WarCraft* and *StarCraft* titles. Before these big PC games made the company a force to be reckoned with, Blizzard developed several titles for the SNES and Mega Drive, including *The Lost Vikings* and *Rock 'n' Roll Racing*.

HISTORY

- WARCRAFT III 2002 [PC]
- DIABLO II 2000 [PC]
- STARCRAFT 1998 [PC]



You can form alliances with other races or just shoot them.

Ghost operative Nova joins the ranks of lithe gaming ladies with large, er, guns.

DETAILS

FORMAT: PS2, Xbox, GameCube
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: VU Games
DEVELOPER: Blizzard
RELEASE: Q3 '04 (Japan/US: TBC)
GENRE: Arcade Adventure
PLAYERS: 1

A tactical stealth action title set in the *StarCraft* universe, *Ghost* centres on the exploits of a human special operative named Nova.

TIME FOR THIS GHOST TO COME OUT OF ITS SHELL

The last official release date for Blizzard's *StarCraft: Ghost* was late 2003, and since then expectation and VU Games' hype seem to have fizzled out in favour of the good (*Half-Life 2*), the bad (*The Simpsons Hit And Run*), and the ugly (*Mace Griffin: Bounty Hunter*). Indeed, *Ghost* is in danger of becoming a spectre of its promised self; let's not forget that a similar situation arose with Ubisoft's *XIII*, which promised so much, yet failed to make the all-formats top ten on the week of its release.

It would be a shame for *StarCraft: Ghost* to follow in these footsteps as it has promised a lot to the console market. It was a bold step for Blizzard Games to announce that the game would not find a home on the PC, where six million gamers have bought into the *StarCraft* universe. But this is not, according to Blizzard, *StarCraft II*. Instead, think of *Ghost* as an alternative trip into the world of the game – a *StarCraft* experience for console owners. The game has plenty to live up to, and as an added potential stumbling block it will be the first trip into a 3D *StarCraft* environment, giving fans of the series a glimpse of what they could only imagine in 2D. If the developer is as passionate about the series as the fans it seems time is being taken in the pursuit of perfection, but with *Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow* just around the corner there may not be a good time to release the game for months.

StarCraft: Ghost has plenty of features to carry it through, and promises more than just a stealth experience with both face-to-face combat and planet-scale warfare high on the agenda. Naturally, the game will be driven by its narrative, with long-limbed, tooled-up protagonist Nova heading down multiple plot paths to what we can only guess will be alternative endings.

Along the way Nova will have an arsenal of *StarCraft* goodies at her disposal, such as the Gauss Rifle and the Perdition Flamethrower. She'll even be able call in tactical strikes from Battlecruisers and Siege Tanks to assist allied forces (if she can't find a suitable vehicle of her own to cause havoc in, that is). Make no mistake, every console gamer and *StarCraft* fan is in for a real treat, providing the game can deliver on half of its promises.

The stealth element is often a feature that hampers modern games as it doesn't really fit as part of the experience, but with *StarCraft: Ghost* the major 3D overhaul should ensure that the game plays like a broader version of *Splinter Cell* with a slightly faster pace. Nova will be able to sneak past guards by the usual creeping around, swinging from wires, scaling walls and tightrope-walking methods, but in such a hi-tech world she needs a little assistance. Her cloaking device may seem like cheating, but as most gaming bad guys are equipped with every technology under the sun (and often dubious AI) it seems only fair that Nova has one. Couple this with her ability to immobilise vehicles and electrical devices, and suddenly *StarCraft: Ghost* is turning into a real genre bender.

A stealth tactical shoot-'em-up action adventure? All for 40 quid? With the pedigree of a game that's sold six million units? Whether it will be worth the wait remains to be seen, but all the signs point towards something quite special, no matter which console you own. Oh, you're a PC gamer? Bad luck…

"MAKE NO MISTAKE, EVERY CONSOLE GAMER AND STARCRAFT FAN IS IN FOR A REAL TREAT"

PREVIOUSLY ON STARCRAFT…

***StarCraft: Ghost* will feature plenty of elements from the original plot – in case you missed it, this is the story so far… Set way into the future, a group of human exiles are fighting for survival and have managed to maintain an uneasy peace between all races in the vicinity. However, as food and resources start to dry up, the humans must look to the rich planets of the Protoss for either help or war. Unfortunately, they didn't count on the arrival of the Zerg, an alien force bent on the destruction of the galaxy. The humans, outnumbered and out-gunned, must fight, but who they side with is uncertain. If ever a plot had the potential for secret allegiances and unexpected betrayals, this is it.**

MIDDLE-EARTH ONLINE



Embark on your adventures as a Hobbit, Elf, Human or Dwarf with a selection of skills.

DETAILS

FORMAT: PC
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Vivendi
DEVELOPER: Turbine
RELEASE: Q4 '04
GENRE: MMORPG
PLAYERS: Massively Multiplayer

Make yourself at home in the Shire, or explore the less savoury lands of Middle-Earth with your very own Fellowship.

NOW YOU CAN VISIT ANY TIME YOU LIKE, BUT CAN YOU EVER LEAVE?

Poor old Vivendi certainly appears to have drawn the short straw in terms of *Lord Of The Rings* licensing. While Electronic Arts has enjoyed lengthy spells at the top end of the charts with titles based on Peter Jackson's blockbuster movies and has a mouth-watering Tolkien-themed RTS project in the pipeline, Vivendi's rights to the original literary works have failed to the capture public's imagination to quite the same extent. However, with no sign of anything resembling a persistent online RPG emerging from the EA camp, *Middle-Earth Online* could be Vivendi's best chance yet to buck this unfortunate trend by reeling in fans of the movies and books alike.

Rich with familiar locations and deeply rooted legends, the realm of Middle-Earth offers the ideal setting in which online adventurers can completely immerse themselves; and thanks to the worldwide renewal of interest in Tolkien's timeless tales, the strength of the licence alone should be enough to guarantee subscriptions galore.

> "THE LICENCE ALONE SHOULD BE ENOUGH TO GUARANTEE SUBSCRIPTIONS GALORE"



There's plenty of adventure to be found in Tolkien's world away from the spotlight of the Fellowship's quest.

Yet despite the irresistible allure of the backdrop, Vivendi also looks to be making every effort to ensure players are welcomed with a fittingly high-quality gaming experience by calling upon the MMORPG expertise of *Asheron's Call* developer Turbine Entertainment to fully realise the concept's vast potential. Players can turn raw materials into goods; set up a home; and even marry their character off and wait for the patter of little Elven feet. The visuals have similarly been designed to make the game world as vibrant and appealing as the genre's finest examples, declaring the game's intentions to endure many years before becoming too noticeably dated.

Turbine is also looking to the long-term future of the online universe by leaving plenty of room for geographic expansion and evolution of the storyline. To begin with only the western region of Eriador will feature, stretching east as far as the Misty Mountains, while the *Lord Of The Rings* timeline has just seen the Fellowship leave the area following their escape from the Mines of Moria. As a result, players will never actually bump into Frodo and company during the game, although talk of their adventures will be rife around the lands they have just passed through.

As long as *Middle-Earth Online* doesn't fall into the trap of relying too much on the licence, this could be RPG heaven for Tolkien fans.


eMag

SHOWCASE

MORE THINGS TO WATCH FOR ON THE GAMING HORIZON

Nanobreaker

OUT ON THE SLASH AGAIN

Format: PlayStation2
Origin: Japan
Publisher: Konami
Developer: In-House
Genre: Action
Players: 1



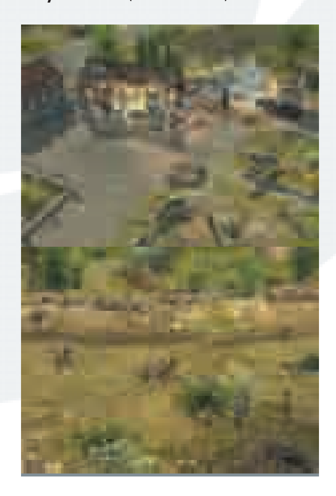
With *Castlevania* having finally arrived on the PS2, the series' legendary producer, Koji Igarashi, was keen to sink his teeth into another 3D action title away from the gothic vampire-slaying scene. In his latest project, *Nanobreaker*, players step into a bleak vision of the future where cyborg antihero Jake Warren is mankind's only hope of defeating a psychotic army of nanomachines who have turned against their human creators. Wielding a multifunctional Plasma Blade capable of morphing into a variety of deadly forms, this should be along the lines of the hack 'n' slash gameplay featured in the likes of *Castlevania* and *Devil May Cry*, albeit with a dark sci-fi flavour and slightly faster pacing to the action.

RELEASE DATE: TBA '04

Soldiers: Heroes Of World War II

A COMMANDOS CONQUEROR?

Format: PC
Origin: Ukraine
Publisher: Codemasters
Developer: Best Way
Genre: Action Strategy
Players: 1 (1-TBC Online)



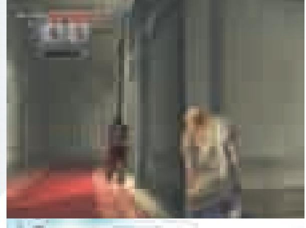
For those gamers who were impressed by the open-ended tactical challenge of the *Commandos* series, but were perhaps less than ecstatic at the games' tendency to punish your every other move, *Soldiers: Heroes Of World War II* could be worth looking out for. Using the familiar premise of commanding an elite special-forces team behind enemy lines, Codemasters promises each of the 25-plus missions will present players with a number of routes to success where the 'all guns blazing' approach can prove just as effective as sneaking around. With over a hundred authentic vehicles, completely destructible scenery and a striking 3D graphics engine, *Soldiers* is certainly sporting an impressive arsenal of potential.

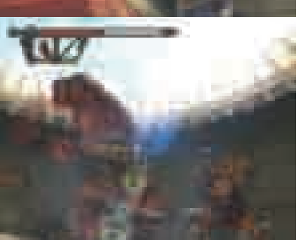
RELEASE DATE: Q3 '04

Shadow Of Rome

NO PLACE LIKE ROME

Format: PlayStation2
Origin: Japan
Publisher: Capcom
Developer: In-House
Genre: Action/Adventure
Players: 1





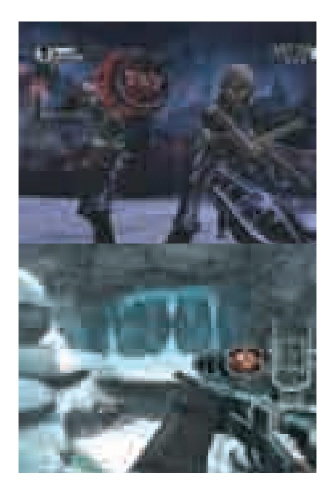
The sights and sounds of ancient Rome will provide the unlikely backdrop for Capcom's recently announced action adventure *Shadow Of Rome*, a game that sees players striving to unravel the conspiracy behind Julius Caesar's murder through the contrasting exploits of heroes Agrippa and Octavius. As battle-hardy centurion Agrippa you'll engage in some intense action sequences, including plenty of brutal skirmishes within the gladiatorial arena; Octavius introduces the game's stealth-based elements as you tiptoe around the city attempting to unravel the sinister plot. Most intriguingly, the game will tailor the number of action and covert sections to your preferences as the story pans out.

RELEASE DATE: Q1 '05

Darkwatch: Curse Of The West

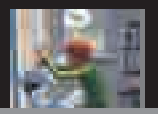
NOT A SPRITE IN SIGHT

Format: PlayStation2, Xbox
Origin: US
Publisher: Sammy Studios
Developer: In-House
Genre: FPS
Players: 1-4 (1-TBC online)



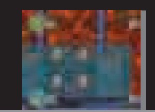
It's unusual for an FPS title to stand out from the heavily overcrowded genre in terms of its premise, yet we'd struggle to name another game that uses the vampire-infested Wild West setting of Sammy's forthcoming blast-fest. The story follows outlaw Jericho Cross who mistakenly attempts a heist on a train belonging to The Darkwatch – a group of vampire hunters who've been protecting humanity from the undead for centuries – only to unleash a horde of evil bloodsuckers, while getting bitten in the process. In response, players must use Jericho's formidable arsenal of firepower and newly acquired vampire abilities to wipe every trace of nosferatu from the visually stunning game world.

RELEASE DATE: Q4 '04



Delayed – The Sims 2 (PC)

■ As one of the most important sequels ever, it's no surprise that EA has postponed the arrival of *The Sims 2* until at least July to ensure the finished game delivers on its promises.



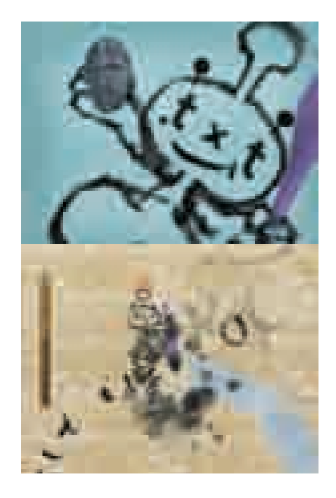
Delayed – Zelda: Four Swords (GC)

■ With the Japanese release of Link's sprite-based multiplayer romp being forced back by a month or so, it's a safe bet that us poor PAL gamers won't be enjoying the wonders of connectivity for that little bit longer. God bless the Freeloader, eh?

Mojib Ribbon

JOT TO THE BEAT, FOOL

Format: PlayStation2
Origin: Japan
Publisher: Sony
Developer: Nana On Sha
Genre: Rhythm Action
Players: 1



The mind behind surreal rhythm action masterpiece *Vib Ribbon* is at it again, pushing the boundaries of ingenious simplicity even further with the deliciously bizarre *Mojib Ribbon*. This time around, genre legend Masaya Matsura (whose credits include cult classics *Parappa The Rapper* and *Um Jammer Lammy*) introduces his latest creation, Mojiburi – a paintbrush-toting scribble attempting to pen the lyrics to quirky Japanese rap tunes in time with the beat. The control scheme may simply be a case of pushing the analog stick up or down at the right moment, yet the wonderfully unique visual style, hidden depths and captivating hip hop grooves help make this gem so compulsively playable.

RELEASE DATE: TBA

Yu-Gi-Oh! WCT 2004

PLAY YOUR CARDS RIGHT. AGAIN

Format: Game Boy Advance
Origin: Japan
Publisher: Konami
Developer: In-House
Genre: Strategy
Players: 1-2



You wouldn't imagine there was much you could do within the constraints of the popular tabletop card game, but given how much we've been stung by previous *Yu-Gi-Oh!* console outings we've been approaching them with caution ever since. Thankfully, this looks to be a welcome return to form for the series with all the expected rule and deck updates in place as well as all manner of familiar duelists to face off against. Unlike *Sacred Cards* (the previous adventure), *World Championship Tournament 2004* follows the rules by the book rather than giving us a butchered version, which is exactly what we want. We're happy to accept change but only if it actually brings something to the game. And no, we're not 12.

RELEASE DATE: TBC '04

Neo Contra

LOOKS LIKE SOMEBODY DIDN'T CONSULT THE ORACLE…

Format: PlayStation2
Origin: Japan
Publisher: Konami
Developer: In-House
Genre: Shoot-'Em-Up
Players: 1-2



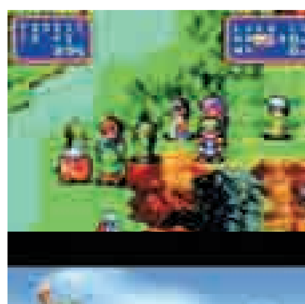
After undergoing a lavish visual revamp in the recent *Contra: Shattered Soldier*, the classic shooter has finally succumbed to the limitations of its side-scrolling framework and will controversially embrace the third dimension in its next PS2 outing. Keen to succeed where so many masters of the 2D realm have failed in the past, Konami is attempting to ensure the gameplay and traditional blistering pace remain as recognisable to fans of earlier *Contra* games as possible. Trigger-happy hero Bill Rizer will once again return in the lead role and this time he'll be joined by all-new samurai character Genbei Yagyu as the pair fight their way through legions of alien minions and some impressively fierce bosses.

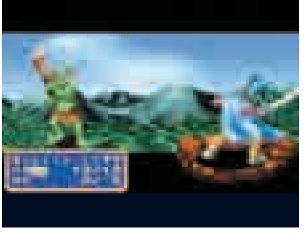
RELEASE DATE: Q4 '04

Shining Force: ROTDD

HERE'S TO THE FUTURE…

Format: Game Boy Advance
Origin: Japan
Publisher: THQ
Developer: SEGA
Genre: Strategy RPG
Players: 1-TBC



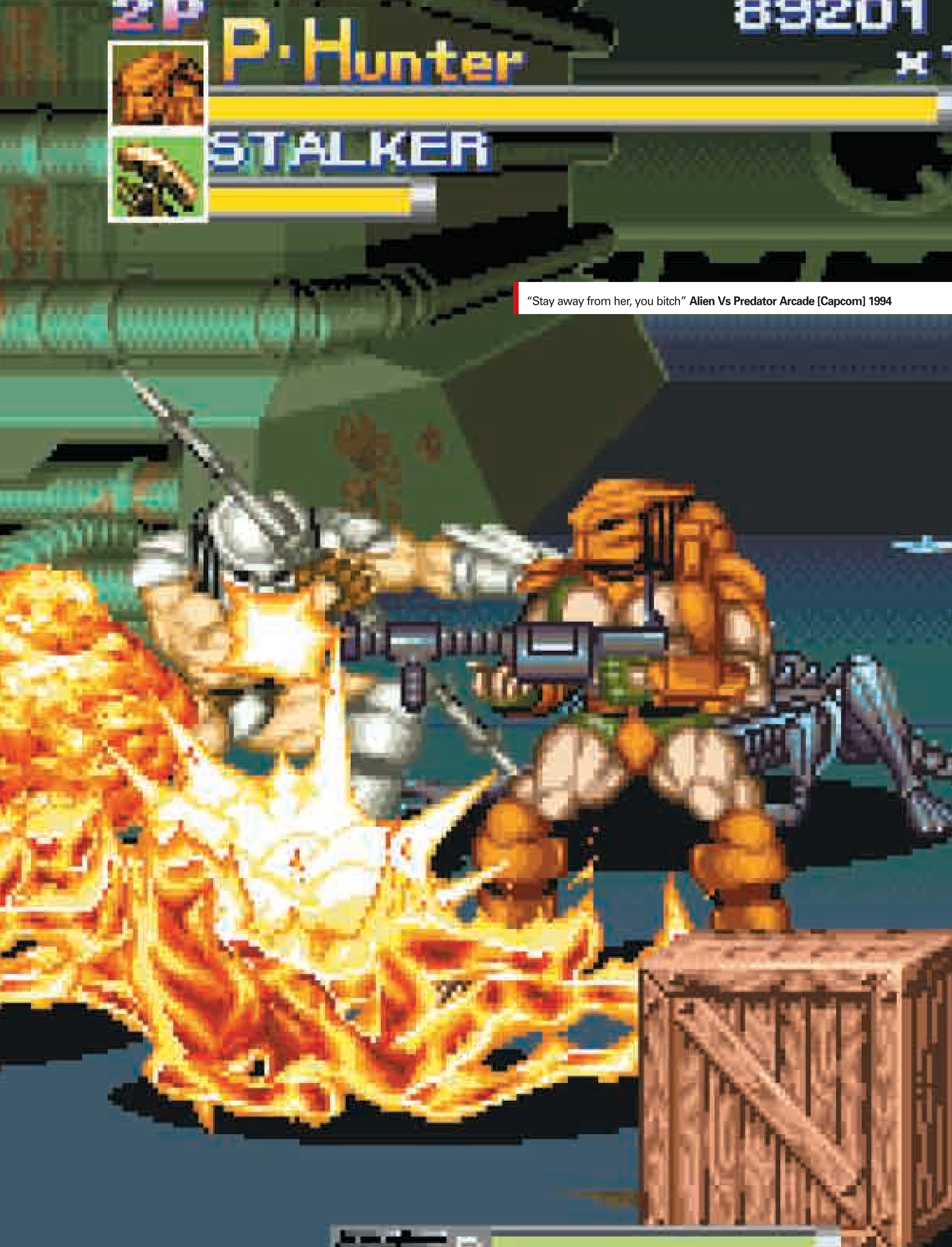


In this the age of the remake, hindsight would suggest that our hopes for this to be an all-new *Shining Force* adventure were optimistic to say the least. Still, with the likes of *Advance Wars* and *Fire Emblem* bringing portable strategy gaming to the masses, an updated remake of one of the finest feats of strategy gaming should open the eyes of the masses to the series in a more appropriate fashion. Promising improved visuals and new elements (such as some kind of card-based tomfoolery) on what has become the home of such titles, we've every hope that *Resurrection Of The Dark Dragon* will be a hit. Rather this than a half-arsed sequel that would sully the good name of the series, right?

RELEASE DATE: APRIL '04



1P
155702
P·Warrior
x2
ARACHNOID



"Stay away from her, you bitch" **Alien Vs Predator Arcade [Capcom] 1994**

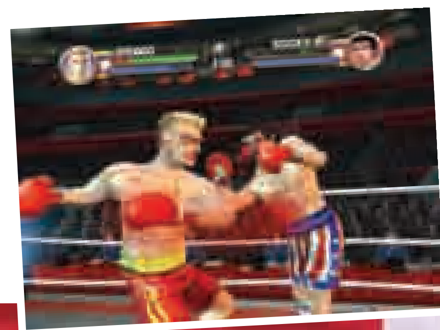
GOD SAVE THE SCENE

ONCE RESPONSIBLE FOR SOME OF THE MOST INNOVATIVE TITLES AROUND, BRITISH DEVELOPERS ARE LOSING THEIR IDENTITY. BUT THIS IS NOT A CASE OF APATHY IN THE UK...

If you ask the average punter to name a British videogame, you're likely to get a slightly puzzled look. Perhaps, after a bit of brow creasing, you might get a hesitant-sounding answer of *Tomb Raider*. Ask that same person to name a British developer, though, and you'd be very lucky to get anything at all bar a stony silence and an excuse that they have to go and talk to someone more interesting. Which is curious, really, because the most popular game of this new decade – *Grand Theft Auto* – is British, despite all Rockstar's attempts to hide the fact. It all used to be so different in the Eighties. Ignoring any rose-tinted arguments about whether games back then were better, worse or more peanut butter-flavoured, the inarguable statement can be made that they were certainly more British. *Monty Mole*, *Head Over Heels*, *Jet Set Willy*, *Skool Daze*, *Jack The Nipper* – one brief glance at any of these games made their country of origin as obvious as if you'd stamped a picture of the Queen on them. *Skool Daze* featured a portrayal of British comprehensive education so peculiar to this country it made *Grange Hill* look like it was set in LA; *Monty Mole* – released at the height of the miners' strike – caricatured miners' leader Arthur Scargill; and no other country would ever name a game *Horace Goes Skiing*.

Nowadays, though, the world's got a lot smaller and the only time you're likely to hear about British developers is as a footnote in a trade newsletter, detailing the latest one to go to the wall. In fact, there's been a lot of those sort of stories lately. In the latter half of last year a dozen or so UK developers went belly up, including Rage, Lost Toys, Crawfish, HotGen and studios run by Infogrames and Vis Entertainment. Since the beginning of 2002, almost 80 software houses have disappeared from the British development scene. Some small softcos are saved by being bought up by bigger companies, but this, combined with UK studio closures, means British games are suffering an identity crisis.

Of course, small developers are always in a precarious position if the hits stop rolling in, no matter where they are in the world. And it's true that over the last 18 months or so the industry as a whole has been consolidating itself so that





smaller developers and publishers are absorbed into ever larger companies. As Fred Gill of the newly formed Gusto Games points out: "About two years ago publishers were really struggling to make profits and that has naturally filtered down to developers. The way that publishers have rationalised is to commission fewer but higher-quality titles and they're being encouraged to do that by the platform holders." This seems a curious change of tack, since the policy of quantity over quality is generally agreed to have been the cornerstone of the PSone's success and the N64's failure, but Gill continues: "Sony, Microsoft and Nintendo do not want poor-quality titles and they don't want too many titles in the marketplace for their platforms."

God Save The Scene

THE GETAWAY



The Getaway might be set in London but is more like a tourist's-eye view than an authentic British experience. Meanwhile, the British-developed *Grand Theft Auto* series has become progressively more US-oriented as the instalments continue.

All of which seems fair enough – it'd be a pretty strange gamer that wouldn't see that as a positive step forward for the industry. But why are UK developers suffering so badly? Is it because they're not any good? Far from it – the amount of effort foreign companies go to to recruit British developers proves this can't be the case. "I know that the States recruits an awful lot of British people because of their technical skills," says Gill. "We've grown up as the bedroom industry and still know how to program in Assembler and go right to the hardware level."

So what is going on? Trevor Williams, formerly of Rage and now head of Swordfish Studios, thinks it's size that matters. "I think this is a global phenomenon, but where the UK seems to be being hit harder is because we have a larger proportion of small developers in this country than probably anywhere else." This is certainly true, but as Williams points out: "Some countries have gone through this crisis period already. I think that's why France is improving. I think France went through a very bad period and now it's come out of that."

necessarily the foreground stuff, but by the background elements. If you ask a UK artist to make a car to drive around in the background he'll build a Ford Escort – a French guy will build a Citroën, a Japanese guy will build a Datsun – and our game looked very British." Sounds promising. What's the catch? "We now have an American publisher and we have worked very hard over the last year to make our game not American, but international," Williams explains. "I think there is a big influence on British developers to do that. I think originally the game was very British because we had a British publisher, but that's no longer the case."

And this seems to be the most important piece of the puzzle. Although developers are probably unwilling to admit it, the lack of muscle of British publishers is ensuring that the smaller UK developers have to pander more than any other to foreign, usually American, publishers. This they can put up with, but because even the largest UK publisher is still a minnow on the world stage there isn't the work around that there used to be. "If you looked at, say, Eidos' portfolio three or four years ago it had about 45 titles," says Williams. "If you look at it now it has more like 20."

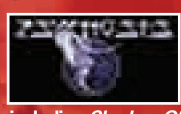
THERE IS A BIG INFLUENCE ON BRITISH DEVELOPERS TO MAKE THEIR GAMES INTERNATIONAL

Most publishers are aware of how hard things are getting for UK developers. In a recent interview with the *Financial Times*, Eidos CEO Mike McGarvey made it clear he thought that small developers were going to have a tricky time of it. According to McGarvey: "A studio of about 150 people, split into three teams, is about the ideal size. It's hard to see how it makes sense for the cottage-industry types. They may have more of a future in post-production as a service-based business." The figures aren't proving him wrong either, with news that even the relatively large Britsoft developer Warthog is in the hole for £2.6 million, according to its first-half results for 2003.

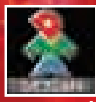
But what effect will the British industry's current problems have on our developers and their games? It's interesting to note that French companies such as Ubisoft are not only performing better than ever but they're also producing games, such as *Beyond Good & Evil*, that exude a distinctive air of continental style and sophistication. So what's stopping British games from encapsulating unique UK sensibilities?

"A year ago our new game, *Cold Winter*, was a British game – a lot of it was set in London," says Williams. "You can tell by the look of a game, not

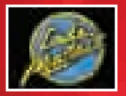
BOOM OR BUST



BOUGHT! **Psygnosis** (Est. 1984) Made over a hundred games including *Shadow Of The Beast*. Created PSone launch title *Wipeout*. Acquired by Sony in 1993, European wing sold to Eidos in 1998.



BOUGHT! **DMA Design** (Est. 1988) Innovative Scottish developer created *Lemmings* and had great success with the *Grand Theft Auto* series. Sold to Gremlin in 1996, then Rockstar in 1999. Now known as Rockstar North.



EXPANDED! **Codemasters** (Est. 1986) Had great success with its *Dizzy* series, recent hits include *Colin McRae Rally*. Now one of the largest UK software publishers with an annual turnover of £60 million.



BOUGHT! **Core Design** (Est. 1988) Made *Indiana Jones*-inspired games starting with *Rick Dangerous* and eventually *Tomb Raider*. Sold to Eidos in 1996 with US Gold and distribution company CentreSoft.



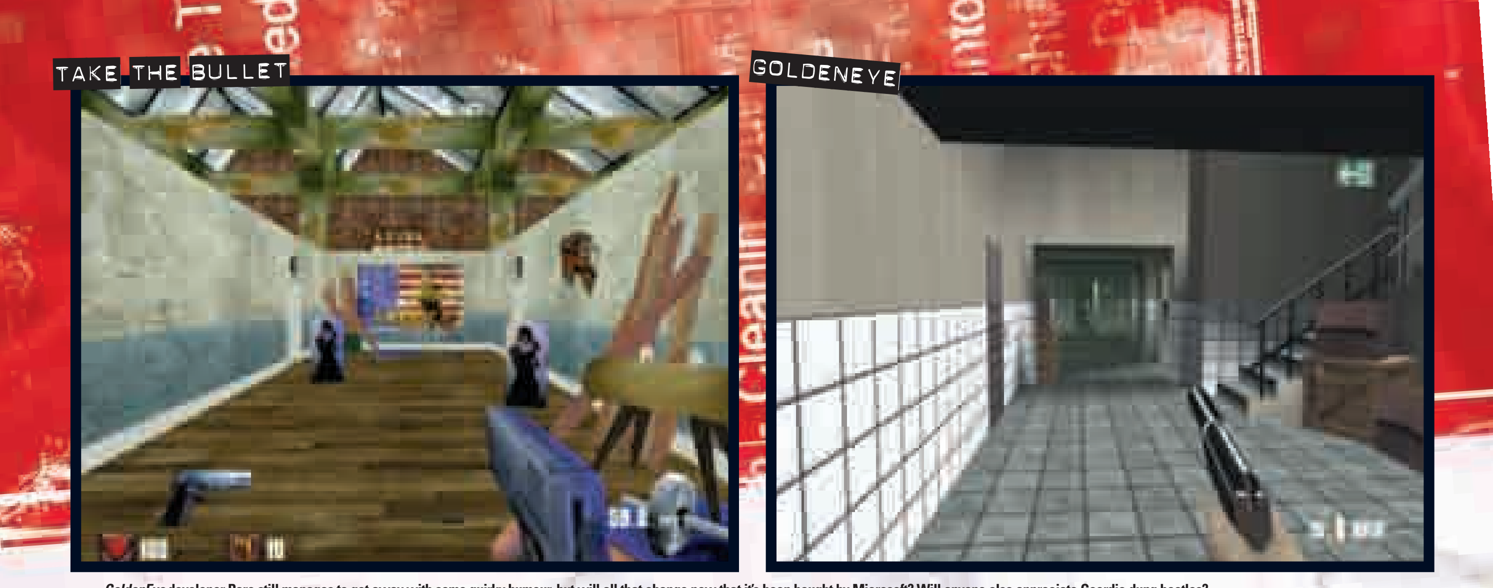
BOUGHT! **Domark** (Est. 1984) Major softco in the Eighties publishing movie licences like *Licence To Kill* and *Empire Strikes Back*. Bought by Eidos in 1995.



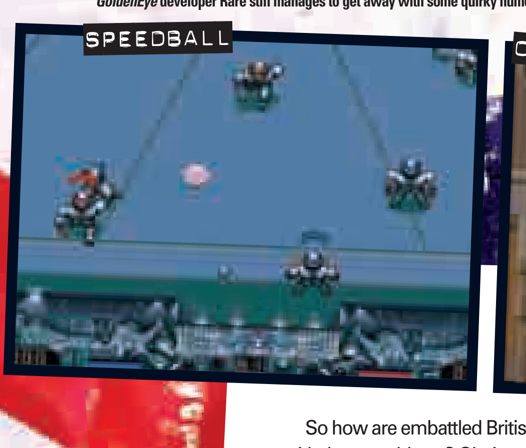
EVOLVED! **Ultimate Play The Game** (Est. 1982) Owned the 8-bit scene with *Atic Atac* and *Sabre Wulf*. Sold Ultimate brand to US Gold in 1986 and became Rare. Nintendo bought 25 per cent in 1995. All sold to Microsoft in 2002.



STOPPED! **Durell** (Est. 1983) Made 8-bit *Saboteur*. Stopped publishing in 1987, now creates database programs for



GoldenEye developer Rare still manages to get away with some quirky humour, but will all that change now that it's been bought by Microsoft? Will anyone else appreciate Geordie dung beetles?



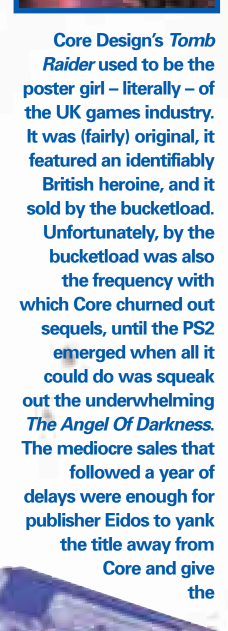


So how are embattled British developers to cope with these problems? Obviously if they can't rely on publishers for financial assistance, an alternative business model must be found. "I know that TIGA [The Independent Games Developers' Association] has been working tirelessly for the last two or three years, lobbying the government to get film industry-style tax breaks that would allow more investment," says Gill. "We're seeing a lot more developers looking at the film finance route – where outsiders fund the project to completion on the basis of regular milestones and their guarantee is the IP [intellectual property] being created – rather than the traditional route where a publisher finances the game using various banking facilities."

The only downside to this, apart from the increased amount of time needed to prove to potential backers than the project is a good one, is that, just like the film model, it means developers are increasingly only being brought together for particular projects and then disbanded – eating away at the concept of a development studio as a constant, singular entity. (Small, tightly knit development studios are another speciality of the UK industry – as Trevor Williams mentions, the average length of service at his company is almost six years.)

Progress has its cost, of course, though TIGA's founding CEO, Fred Hasson, says most UK developers are prepared to make sacrifices. But how receptive are the publishers to suggestions about ▷

TOMB RAIDED

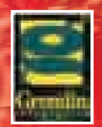


Core Design's *Tomb Raider* used to be the poster girl – literally – of the UK games industry. It was (fairly) original, it featured an identifiably British heroine, and it sold by the bucketload. Unfortunately, by the bucketload was also the frequency with which Core churned out sequels, until the PS2 emerged when all it could do was squeak out the underwhelming *The Angel Of Darkness*. The mediocre sales that followed a year of delays were enough for publisher Eidos to yank the title away from Core and give the development duties of the next game to American outfit Crystal Dynamics. Which will no doubt see Lara suddenly talking with a Texan drawl and living in a trailer park.

BOOM OR BUST



insurance firms. EVOLVED! **Elite** (Est. 1983) Pioneered games based on licences such as *Airwolf*. Now converting classic games for mobile gaming.



BOUGHT! **Gremlin** (Est. 1984) Had 8-bit success with *Monty Mole* and the *Actua Soccer* on the PSone. Bought by Infogrames in 1999.



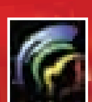
SURVIVED! **Team 17** (Est. 1990) Originally 17-Bit Software, found success with *Alien Breed* and signed up *Worms*, which it developed for most formats. Still developing *Worms* games.



DEFUNCT! **Hewson** (Est. 1980) Had 8-bit success with *Cybernoid* and *Nebulus* but went bust in 1991. Andrew Hewson set up 21st Century. This firm went under in 1998.



BOUGHT! **Imagine** (Est. 1982) An Eighties success with games like *Zzoom* and *Zip Zap* but went bust in 1984 and was sold to Ocean Software. Ocean was sold to Infogrames in 1998.



SUCCESS! **Argonaut** (Est. 1984) Created *Starglider* for the C64 and made the Super-FX chip for SNES game *Starfox*. Argonaut became a PLC in 2000 and is now making a healthy profit.



DEFUNCT! **Rage** (Est. 1992) Had huge success with games like *Rocky* on PS2 and was worth £500 million at one stage. Went into receivership in January 2003.



ELITE



JET SET WILLY

how they should change their practices? "Funnily enough, they're not terribly keen," admits Hasson. The smaller UK publishers are aware of the problems, though, and cutting the number of titles in development has done much to improve their position, but neither side appears to be happy to compromise.

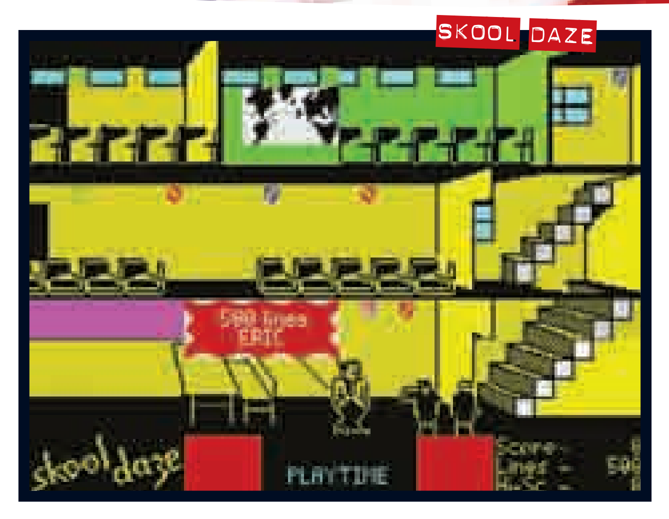
Yet the UK development industry might have a somewhat unlikely saviour. "I'll tell you the most encouraging thing I ever heard from a publisher," says Hasson. "And that was from EA. It was Tim Heaton [senior development director at EA Partners] and he said to me, 'there is creative talent in the UK that will always want to work for themselves on their own IP. EA's success is two-part: one continuing to develop our own internal studios and IP and the other acknowledging that this external talent exists and finding a way to engage with it and help it to prosper.' I wish there were more companies like EA."

And when you hear phrases like that bandied about you know that times are a-changing. But assuming that the UK industry can work its way out of its current problems – and from a business perspective it certainly seems to be moving in the right direction – what of the creative side? It's hard to imagine EA, or any large multinational, being very keen to allow UK developers to keep filling their games with Ford Escorts and footy references. Richard Leinfellner, who's been part of the UK gaming scene since the days of the Commodore 64 and is now VP of EA UK Studio, is as pragmatic as you'd expect. "The reality is that the consumer makes informed choices on what he or she buys," he says. "They are informed by Hollywood, TV, music and so on. Games are just part of an entertainment landscape which is US-dominated. Local content is fine as long as you understand it restricts it to a local market."

It may be the case that particularly British content would deter some buyers, but what actually makes our games different from any everyone else's? It's probably wishful thinking to imagine that British games were ever unusually imaginative or innovative – it's not as if the rest of the world didn't come up with its own equally unique ideas – but it is true that most of the biggest-selling UK titles were pleasingly difficult to pigeonhole into any one genre. We gave the world *Elite*, *Head Over Heels*, *Exile*, *Paradroid*, *Starglider*, *Speedball*, *Stunt Car Racer*, *The Sentinel*, *Lords Of Midnight* and *Mercenary*. You'll notice that despite all these games being laudably original and potentially the progenitors of whole new sub-genres, none of them have any real modern-day counterpart; half of them didn't even get a sequel. This seems to be because nearly all of these games were only a big success in this country – the rest of the world hasn't seen them, so gaming as a



The French games industry seems to be weathering the current global storm better than almost any other country. In part this is due to the French government's willingness to help out with cold hard cash. As Richard Leinfellner of EA explains: "The government in France has a policy of supporting the continuance of French culture and language on a worldwide stage, using taxpayers' money. Recently they handed out a few million [€4 million, about £2.9 million] to keep French games focusing on French product alive. My personal view is that this state intervention is a short-term fix, which does not address the core problem of selling on a world-wide stage." So there you have it: the French are cheating…



SKOOL DAZE


HEAD OVER HEELS

whole has been denied a whole extra avenue of artistic expression. The videogames world has obviously got on fine without us, but imagine the world of music without The Beatles, or comedy without Monty Python. The importance of these acknowledged greats can be measured just as much by their influence on others as by their own achievements. Of course, it doesn't cost £5 million to pick up a pen and start writing a sketch about parrots, but surely the odd very obviously British game could be smuggled through? You only have to look at the Japanese market – where a Western title in the top ten is as rare as a pachinko simulator in our own charts – to see that some developers are perfectly happy to service their local customers first and everyone else second.

The usual counter to this example is that the Japanese market is huge in comparison to the UK, but figures from ELSPA show that UK consumers spent £1.08 billion on videogames in 2002. According to Japanese firm Media Create the Japanese software market was worth ¥349 billion (£1.93bn) during the same period. That's clearly bigger, but it's not that much bigger – you'd think that very occasionally the UK could pander to its own.

"We were developing this game once," says Williams. "It was kind of a dating sim but with *Crazy Taxi*-style bits where you would basically just drive around trying to pick up girls and making yourself more attractive by going to the gym and stuff. Everyone that saw it loved it, but they could never get it green-lighted. They were too scared of it because of the humour and worries about sexism." Indeed if there's one obvious thing British titles can add to the world of gaming it's the odd bit of levity. As games get ever more po-faced, a spot of comedy can come as a breath of fresh air. "I wish there was more humour in games," laments Williams. "It might be rubbish to play now, but you're much more likely to laugh at *Jet Set Willy* than *Medal Of Honor*." Even those games that do get made with UK-centric content seem to suffer from some horrible compromise. SCEE's ghastly *The Getaway* is about as British as *Mary Poppins*, and despite obvious efforts Rare isn't as funny as it likes to think it is, with its refusal to employ professional scriptwriters and voice actors always scuppering its attempts to add regional content. Which is a pity as it's about the only British developer rich enough to risk alienating a few Yanks by putting Geordie dung beetles in its games.

But beyond these surface details the most important fact is that British games just don't innovate in the way the use to; they just can't afford to – in both senses of the word. The world can live without *Head Over Heels 2*, but with nothing to take its place that shows anything like the same level of imagination and originality there's a very good chance that the concept of British games as an identifiably different product to that of the rest of the world could be over. The worst aspect of this tragedy is that most people in the US and beyond will never have even realised it existed at all.

IF THERE IS ONE THING THAT BRITISH TITLES CAN CREATE IT IS THE ODD BIT OF LEVITY



THE SILVER LININGS...

While all this might make it sound as though the games development industry in the UK is at death's door, there is a ray of hope in the darkness. Smaller developers might be going out of business but there are still plenty of medium-sized and bigger names flying the flag for Great Britain; from old-school companies like Lionhead, Team 17 and Revolution Software to relatively recent successes such as Bizarre Creations and Firefly Studios. Even companies on the verge of collapse can sometimes recover – you only have to look at developers like Swordfish Studios (see our Community feature on page 32) for proof. And there are still new companies being formed, such as the recently announced Circle Studio in Derby. Obviously, it's not all blue skies, but at least there's still some chance for us yet…



Get ready to return to the world of *Final Fantasy* – and bring your friends along too. But will *Crystal Chronicles*' GBA connectivity be an exciting new venture or just a gaming gimmick?

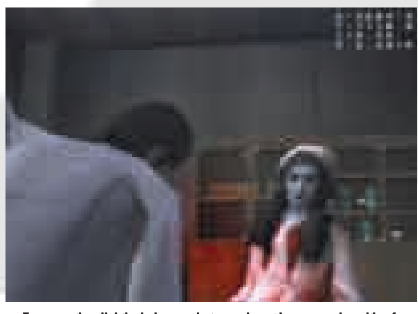


Jump on board the Crystal Caravan to collect those vital Mirula Droplets. But don't go thinking your journey will be simple. Surprises lie in wait…

REVIEWS

THE AVERAGE

Despite representing an industry in which high scores mean everything, **games™** is not a magazine that marks with the majority. A lot of people think that anything below seven (7.0, 70%, whatever) is a bad score – we don't. Going on a scale of one to ten, five is the average – average being a game that does what it sets out to do without attempting to do it better than anyone else. If a game gets five, you'll get some enjoyment out of it but nothing more, simple as that. What's more, we won't be swayed by PR people telling us what a game's like – we only decide once we've played each game to death and, in the majority of cases, to completion. If a game's bad, we'll make sure you know; if it's great, we'll sing its praises. At the end of the day, we're just here to help you decide what's worth your hard-earned cash. After all, if it wasn't for you, we'd be out of a job.



For once, the slightly dodgy combat can almost be excused – with a few exceptions, these characters aren't naturally aggressive.

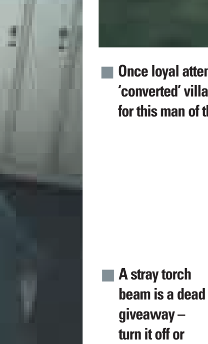


Though you won't see your own death in grisly close-up, *Forbidden Siren's* direction doesn't exactly pull any punches…





Once loyal attendees to his services, the 'converted' villagers no longer have any respect for this man of the cloth. Heathen swine.



A stray torch beam is a dead giveaway – turn it off or face trouble.



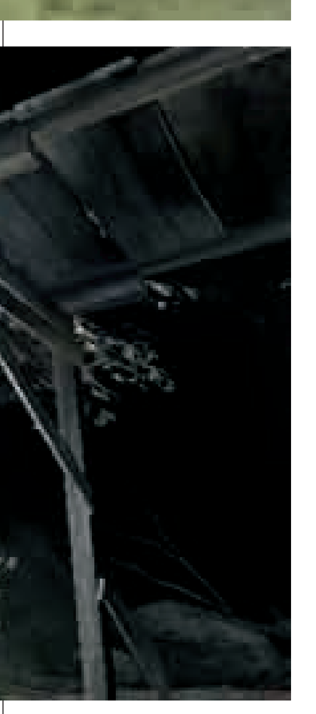
Alerted enemies will pursue you to the end so be as discreet as possible.





ZOMBIES ATE MY NEIGHBOURS, FOR REAL

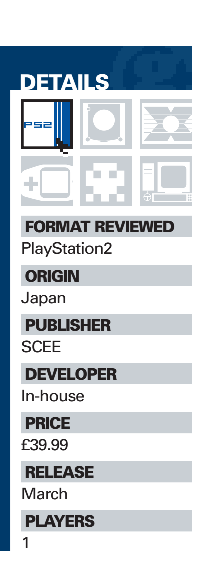
FORBIDDEN SIREN



Terrified, you stop dead in your tracks. That noise… What the hell is it? In making it this far, you've learned to tune out most of the unholy sounds but this rhythmic pounding is something different. Creeping slowly forwards, you can just about make out the silhouette of a person (or what once may have been a person, at least) at the far end of the gloomy corridor. The current state of Hanyuda village would suggest that he or she won't be particularly welcoming – well, that and the fact that said shadowy figure is pounding the hell out of the wall with a hammer. Cowering in the shadows you concentrate your thoughts on the being that blocks your path, and as you start to see through his eyes, things get even stranger.

The incessant hammering is entirely without reason; simply an act of wanton aggression from a crazed individual, and it shows no signs of stopping. Trying desperately to forget the purposeful grunts of the hammering freak, you sneak towards the only exit, which lies (rather cruelly) behind him. Thankfully, this guy is so caught up in his 'work' that he doesn't even notice you. Pulse racing, you manage to sneak through the tiny gap and past the otherwise engaged maniac. Blind with relief, you immediately grab the handle of the door and quickly swing it open. It's too late when you realise the full extent of your mistake, and as the searing creak echoes down the corridor a fleeting glimpse through the eyes of a murderer ushers in the last minute of your life…

It's easy for a game to boast engrossing set pieces in real time, but all too often even some of the best games can only deliver a few thrills in this manner. They can be considered a real seal of quality and although *Forbidden Siren* can't offer beach landings or epic battles, the constant tension it creates is far more striking than any one-off five-minute blow-out. Finding inspiration in all manner of places – classic horror movies, Japanese culture and the works of HP Lovecraft to pin down but a few – *Forbidden Siren* is a very stylish game. From locations and characters to subtle animation details, it's easy to see the amount of care that has gone into the coding of this game. Blending frames



SPINNING THE WEB

The internet is a scary place at the best of times – an absolute mess of chat-room liars, mysterious multi-million-dollar proposals and people offering to enlarge this or sell you that – and *Forbidden Siren*'s official website is as bizarre as they come. Hidden away in the darkest, grimiest corner of the internet (and handily accessible via the www.forbidden-siren.com redirect), the animation-heavy site is terrible if you want to know about the game but absolutely perfect for getting a feel for the revolutionary title.





It usually helps to hide somewhere you can't be seen…

"AS YOUR CHARACTER IS KNOCKED DOWN THE VIEW CUTS TO THAT OF YOUR ASSAILANT AS THE SCREEN FADES OVER YOUR FUTILE ATTEMPTS AT SURVIVAL"

of animation, the elaborate facial animations add to the style no end, but the question of how such a dark game (in every sense) can be so pretty is one that still remains unanswered.

The concept of death is not one to which *Forbidden Siren* will endlessly subject you; more often than not, your character will be knocked down for the last time before the view cuts to that of your assailant as the screen fades over your final futile attempts at survival. Some of the weaker characters don't even need to take a beating before giving up the fight – as soon as you're found and cornered, consider it game over. The same applies to enemies, though; they only take a few hits to put down (when you're lucky enough to be armed at all) but you'll never actually be able to kill them. Thankfully, they do stay down for some time and you do have one rather ingenious (albeit somewhat passive) weapon at your disposal…

The ability to 'sight-jack', or see through the eyes of your enemies, could easily have been nothing more than a flashy gimmick, but thanks to clever integration this genuinely creepy ability is absolutely essential. Allowing you to pinpoint enemy locations, you're able to plan your path through the chaos as well as putting together a mental hierarchy of the best-armed freaks so you know who to avoid. The concept of playing as a civilian is far from original, but going through the survival horror archives it tends to be something that is lost after the first few minutes of play. Not so here, and with few exceptions the characters are defenceless. While it would be easy to criticise the slightly clunky combat, the excuse that none of the characters are combat-trained is a valid one.

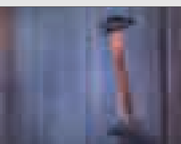
Like all the best games, *Forbidden Siren*'s narrative is a fairly simple concept that, with a twist here and a few turns for good measure there, quickly develops into quite the storyline. This is played out in a strangely non-linear fashion, flitting between characters and locations with only your memory and a rather complex chart to let you know where your current predicament fits in the grand scheme of things. A little daunting at first, this soon begins to take shape and make sense, and as the chart fills up and events become linked on the timeline you're left wondering why this technique isn't one we see more often.

Having put a little time into the Japanese version of the title (simply called *Siren*), it was clear that every element of the game was conspiring to scare the bejesus out of the player. Most of this is thankfully carried over to the PAL release with one exception, and it's far from a

24:00 TIMELINE HIGHLIGHTS

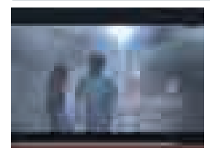
THE BEST BITS IN THE GAME AND WHEN YOU CAN EXPECT TO SEE THEM

01:00 HOUR



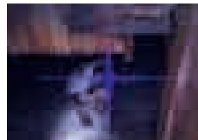
You've learned the sinister secret behind sight-jacking, run away from a few of your 'changed' neighbours and finished a couple of chapters. You're quite scared.

24:00 HOURS



With the storyline and its intertwining threads starting to fall into place, the terrifying truth surrounding 'the incident' is beginning to emerge. You're feeling timorous.

ONE WEEK



Desensitised to the awful voice-over, *Forbidden Siren* will have had such an impact that you're scared to turn on the lights in your house for fear of being spotted. Maybe.



Camera angles often highlight key collectables or locations.



The best weapon in the game is best described as 'old-school', although it does prove remarkably useful at times.

SILENT HILL



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN

PROJECT ZERO

ON THE MENU

One thing about *Forbidden Siren* that may frustrate players is the reliance on menus for most non-essential actions – getting people to follow you or using an item is done via a simple menu assigned to the Triangle button. This does break up the pacing slightly (but on the flipside it also facilitates multiple actions without the need to get bogged down in a sea of controls). A good example of how menus can slow things down is served up right at the start of the game (just after the worst delivery of the line "Oh my God!" you're ever likely to hear). Having found a set of car keys you need to access the menu on three separate occasions in order to unlock the car door, put the key in the ignition and then turn it. A little convoluted perhaps, but at the same time it does make your escape that much more intense. The jury is still out…

FAQs

Q. SHOULDN'T IT BE SUBTITLED?
Yes – it would seem like a no-brainer that even with a great-sounding cast, a subtitle job would be preferable. Oh well.

Q. WHERE ARE MY MINI-GUNS?
Forget it – you might get to play with a vintage rifle or a six shooter once in a while but nothing more.

Q. BUT IS IT SCARY?
Even with the atrocious dubbed cut-scenes, *Siren* still rates among the most terrifying games out there.

minor one: the game has been dubbed into English with no option to play it subtitled. Normally, this wouldn't be quite so bad but given the horrific mockney accents that spew forth from virtually all the characters, *Forbidden Siren*'s cut-scenes terrify for all the wrong reasons. Mercifully, this travesty of casting is saved for movie sequences, leaving the main game to scare you for the reasons that the developers originally intended.

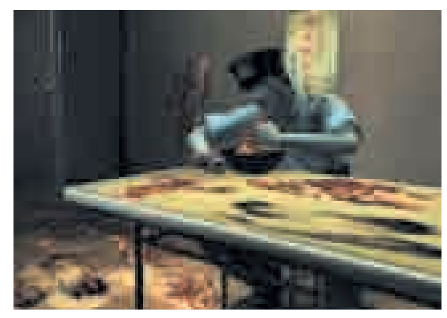
But in a game so clearly reliant on tension, ambience and atmosphere, it's almost unthinkable that somebody at one of the largest entertainment companies in the world would not just choose dubbing rather than subtitling in such an Eastern title but, worse still, green-light the appalling finished dub which may well have permanently damaged our ears. It seems almost barbaric to penalise a game that is otherwise approaching masterpiece status for its shortcomings in an area such as this, but the irony is that Sony's treatment of one of its best in-house products is just that: barbaric. There is the odd moment when you think that maybe it's not so bad – it is only the cut-scenes that really suffer, after all – but before long the silence is shattered in excruciating fashion.

Perhaps this tirade is overly damning but, ultimately, it's more frustrating to see a potential classic fall at the hands of something so seemingly petty. Effectively taking all the best ideas and themes from every medium designed to shock or scare, *Forbidden Siren* is pieced together from everything that is good about survival horror, just as *Halo* was in its genre. This in itself makes for a good analogy – imagine how frustrating *Halo* would have been if every enemy and ally said and did the same thing every time you played a level and you should start to see our predicament. Logic would dictate that a game that does so much right and so little wrong should score higher than this. But much as it pains us to say this, it's amazing how a few tiny stones can bring down even the mightiest of giants.





A few of the characters are lucky enough to be armed with some form of respectable weapon – learn to love these guys.



Normally a scene like this would just be funny but, somehow, *Forbidden Siren* manages to add tension to even the most ridiculous moment.



VERDICT 7/10
SO VERY CLOSE TO HORROR SUPREMACY

THE RIDGE RACER TEAM RETURNS WITH A NEW ATTITUDE

R: RACING EVOLUTION

DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

OTHER FORMATS
Xbox, GameCube

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Electronic Arts

DEVELOPER
Namco

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
March '04

PLAYERS
1-2

There was once a time when *Ridge Racer* was coveted by fans of the driving genre. A time of huge powerslides, when gaudy, unlicensed cars with passing resemblances to the latest exotica could blast round city circuits with little regard for accurate weighting, handling or performance figures. Boy, we had fun. Lots of us, too. But over the last few years, the series has faded into relative obscurity, fondly recollected but massively overshadowed by serious, tight-lipped simulators like *Gran Turismo*; balls-out, hyper-fast arcade titles like *Burnout*; or games like *Project Gotham* that can do both with effortless ease.

Resurrecting the *Ridge Racer* name was not a task to be undertaken lightly. Which is perhaps why this game has a different moniker – to reflect its new serious intentions and the inclusion of a multitude of motorsports (GT, touring car, rally, classic car and even drag racing). There's even a *TOCA Race Driver*-esque narrative as well, albeit with a chesty young nymphet called Rena Hayami rather than an arrogant hothead like Ryan McKane. A classic arcade racer turned sim with a story? What's going on? Truth is, we're not sure Namco knows either. The good news is that *R: Racing Evolution* features a pleasantly surprising line-up of past and present motors ranging from the Motorsport Elise to a Dodge Charger to a Renault Alpina, as well as authentic Japanese tracks like Suzuka and Yokohama. These factors, plus the ability to do the usual spanner-monkey tweaking like altering brake bias and damper settings as well as buying upgrades for each car, suggests that this could be a title gunning for a *Turismo* reputation.

But when you take your car onto the track you find that this is not the case at all. Imagine the handling of *Ridge Racer* after it has eaten too many pies and you're pretty close to the mark. You've got a multitude of different cars, with varying power outputs and different wheels; yet they all feel the same. Whether it's a front-wheel-drive Honda Integra or however-many-hundred-horsepower Chrysler Viper, they all have an unpleasant tendency to fishtail around as if a drunk is behind the wheel. All the usual conventions applied to prevent a spin seem strangely absent here. Yes, 'drift' handling can be fun, but only when the balance of the car feels like it's under your control.

games™ FINGERPRINT
WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE
FUNNY HOW?: *R: Racing* may be more straight-laced than its forebears, but it still has time for some tongue-in-cheek fun – like a modified Fiat 500 that you must use to race GT Vipers and NSXs…

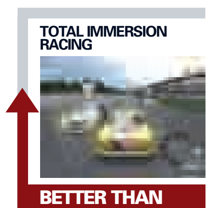
FAQs

Q. PHWOAR, A GIRL! DO YOU GET TO SEE HER IN THE SHOWER?
Er, yes actually, you do. Namco isn't afraid of mild titillation to keep gamers playing.

Q. DO YOU GET DECENT CARS?
Despite a relatively small number of vehicles, the range is eclectic – American muscle cars, Le Mans racers and Seventies rally classics are among the line-up.

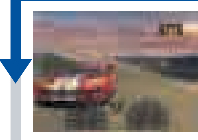
Q. BETTER THAN RIDGE RACER?
Not really. Previous games had an arcade focus and this has confused things with stats and figures.

TOTAL IMMERSION RACING



BETTER THAN

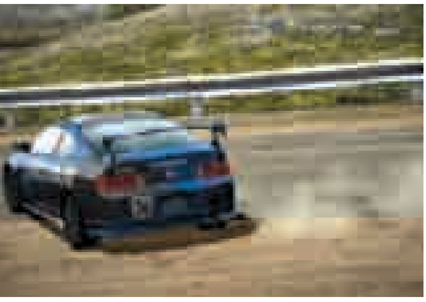
WORSE THAN



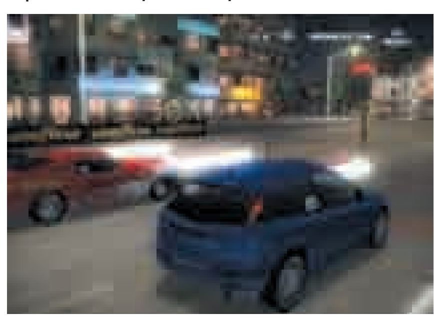
GRAN TURISMO 3: A-SPEC



Not only are all the cars licensed, many sport accurate liveries too. Sadly, all the pixel-perfect paintwork can't make up for the slightly haphazard handling and the fact that each sort of racing here has been done better elsewhere.



The rally stages highlight the flaws in the handling the most. We like powerslides, but only if it feels like you can hold them.



A drag race? Very *Need For Speed: Underground* you might think. Well think again, it's not that exciting.

DO I HAVE TO PARALLEL PARK?

The main focus of *R: Racing* is the Racing Life mode which tracks the exploits of promising young racing starlet Rena Hayami. Plucked from obscurity as an ambulance driver, Rena is thrust into the limelight as a motorsport driver for the GVI Company. It's keen to promote you as the next big thing, but are Rena's financial backers as honest as they seem? You'll have to watch a number of chest-oriented cut-scenes to find out more… The construction of the characters works much better than in *TOCA Race Driver* and their presence gives personalities to other drivers that many games in the genre lack.



■ Once the bar above the car in front starts flashing red, the chances of the driver making an error increase massively.



■ Yep, that's a Fiat 500. And yep, it's about to come flying past a race-spec GT car. There's nothing wrong with a sense of humour.







R: Racing hints at simulator handling, yet throws in arcade frivolity and ends up confused. It's not impossible to adapt to it, but it takes far too long before the blancmange-like handling begins to feel anything like second nature.

Still, should you manage to get to grips with the driving style then there is plenty for you to do. *R: Racing* can't boast a *GT* or *Gotham*-sized showroom (there are less than 40 cars), but it makes up for it with the sheer volume of tasks. As well as the story-driven Racing Life mode, *R: Racing* features a massive Event Challenge mode too. Much like in Namco's *Moto GP* titles there are hundred of individual tasks – ranging from tournaments, rival races, one-make championships and rally time-trials – that are bound to take an impressive amount of time to complete. But even if your prize is a Bentley Le Mans car, are you likely to care when it drives like every other vehicle and offers no greater sense of speed than a Mini Cooper?

There are a couple of features in *R: Racing* that we do like, though. The in-race chatter and the ability to intimidate fellow drivers, for example. A bar hovers above each car denoting how calm its driver is – tailgate them for long enough, the bar will fill and the likelihood of them making an error increases. Once they slip up you can casually drift past to the sounds of them cursing you and your mother and no doubt screaming how big your bottom looks in that race suit. Thankfully, words of encouragement from your pit crew and mentors stop you feeling like too much of a hate figure and their cheering actually spurs you on to finish a race. It gets repetitive after a while, but it's nice to know your hard work is being appreciated.

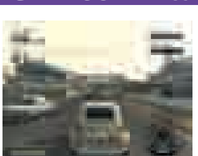
An enduring fondness for the *Ridge Racer* series could be enough to encourage you to pick up *R: Racing*, and its attempt at being a jack-of-all-trades could seem quite appealing to gamers who casually approach the driving genre. Connoisseurs, on the other hand, will own the highest quality examples of each trade that do each job better, leaving *R: Racing Evolution* feeling mostly redundant.



TOO CONFUSED TO DO ANYTHING BRILLIANTLY

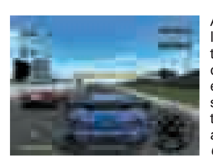


GAMECUBE £39.99 MARCH '04



R: Racing is probably at its strongest here. Not only is there less competition but the graphics look crisper and more detailed than the PS2. The handling feels less twitchy too.

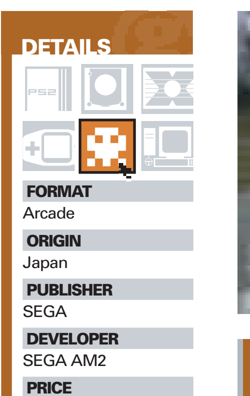
XBOX £39.99 MARCH '04



Although *R: Racing* looks best on Xbox, the machine could do better. With no extra features to speak of, there's little to draw gamers away from *Project Gotham Racing 2*.

SEGA SHOWS US HOW TO PUT THE PEDAL TO THE METAL AGAIN

OUTRUN 2



DETAILS

FORMAT
Arcade

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
SEGA

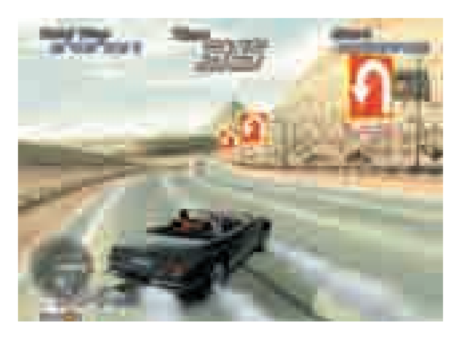
DEVELOPER
SEGA AM2

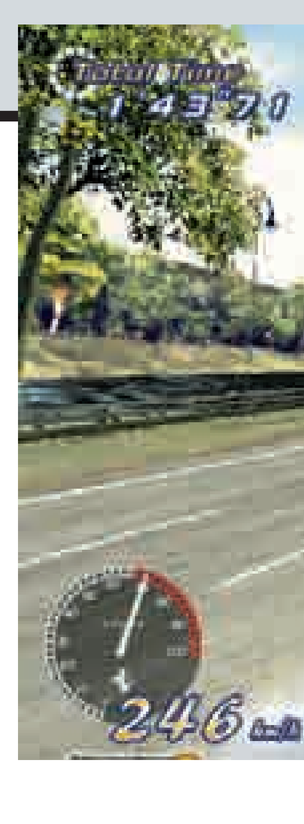
PRICE
£1 per play

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-4







God bless the man who invented rose-tinted glasses. Without them we'd never be able to enjoy half the retro games that we do today; our horribly critical and jaded minds would force us to realise the depressing truth: gaming really has come such a long way since 'the good old days' that trying to break our favourite games down into the purest fundamentals makes them sound terrible. A racing game with one car, one incredibly long track and nothing but repetitive corners to negotiate? It's hardly the kind of thing to get our gaming pulses racing, but then that's never stopped us thinking that *OutRun* is still one of the most enjoyable and gamer-friendly arcade racers ever created.

The strange thing is, turning the clock forward 17 years since the original AM2 racer came out doesn't appear to have had much of an impact on the game's long-awaited and cunningly titled sequel, *OutRun 2*. Looking at the rest of the industry, you'd think we were in an age where arcade games are having to rely more and more on hulking cabinets, external peripherals and other supposedly game-enhancing gimmicks in order to encourage people to play. Despite all this, though, *OutRun 2* gleefully wears its heart on the sleeve of its Eighties-style *Miami Vice* jacket, pops a cassette of Huey Lewis tunes into the tape deck and invites you to enjoy a game that, flashy visuals aside, isn't much different to its teenage predecessor. We should be offended by this lack of progress, being the forward-thinking gamers we are, but we're too busy having fun to care.

Proving that you don't need to go overboard on the bells and whistles if you've got good gameplay, *OutRun 2* is quite possibly the most accessible racer we've played in the arcade since the joys of *SEGA Rally*. We say that not just because the premise is a fairly simple one – floor the accelerator, avoid anything in your way and hit the checkpoints before the timer runs out – but also because this particular reviewer admits to not being very good at racing games and yet even he managed to pick up the basics and start driving (or at least, looking) like a pro within a couple of



■ *OutRun 2* pays homage to the original as much as possible – right down to the fat guy waving the starting flag.









ENHANCED

gamesTM

IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

A LA MODE: New game modes such as Time Attack and Heart Attack offer different experiences.

COR BLIMEY: Against the original, *OutRun 2* looks truly gorgeous and runs really smoothly too.





credits. Short of knowing how to use a steering wheel and keeping away from obstacles like walls or other cars, the only skill you'll have to pick up is the powerslide; a quick jab of the brake as you turn into a corner and you'll be able to perform drifts of almost physics-defying proportions. It's simple but effective – just like the rest of *OutRun 2*'s gameplay.

This being a sequel though (and one that's been 17 years in the making), it's only natural to expect more additions than just the ability to powerslide your Ferrari round tight bends. Interestingly, though, *OutRun 2*'s most distinctive mode is something you might expect to find added to a home port, rather than the original arcade game. Heart Attack mode might not sound too appealing, but it's incredibly good fun. Not only must you focus on beating the time limit, but also on satisfying the constant demands of your girlfriend riding in the passenger seat. Initially, you'll only get two 'requests' per stage, usually ordering you to overtake as many cars as you can or perform a massive drift within a set part of the course; the better you do, the more Hearts you'll receive for your effort. As your Hearts mount up, tougher requests start appearing and very soon it'll be a struggle to keep your companion happy if you want to reach the checkpoint in time. Again, it's incredibly simple and yet works a treat – so much so, in fact, that we could barely bring ourselves to move away from the cabinet once we ran out of change.

And it's this horribly addictive yet oh-so-simple quality that probably explains why *OutRun 2* is so damn enjoyable. Despite taking full advantage of the graphical advances made since the original game, SEGA has once again managed to teach us a lesson that's long since been forgotten by the modern gamer – gameplay doesn't have to be overly complicated or demanding in order to be fun. Of course, this opinion might not hold water should SEGA change its mind and decide to bring *OutRun 2* to the home console market – to be brutally honest, even us stalwart SEGA fanatics would be hard-pressed to spend £40 on what is essentially a one-trick pony. For now, though, we're happy with our stack of pound coins and the elusive promise of another checkpoint just around the corner. If only all arcade games could be this accessible.



VERDICT 8/10

A SHOT OF ADRENALINE TO YOUR RACING ARM

A CABINET BUILT FOR FOUR

If you're lucky enough to find an arcade with two sit-down cabinets (or four stand-up ones), you'll be able to challenge your friends to an old-fashioned sprint to the finish. Versus mode plays much the same as the normal OutRun mode, but with the clock tweaked slightly in your favour. This makes your opponents the biggest adversary rather than the time limit, meaning that even racers without much experience can make it through to the later stages of the game. Of course, the added challenge of having rivals means you have to concentrate more on driving rather than showboating – powersliding might look cool, but when it slows you down enough for the opposition to catch up it's not such a good idea…

FAQs

Q. WHAT'S DIFFERENT?
Apart from the massively enhanced graphics, a few new play modes and the ability to powerslide your car… er, hardly anything actually. Not that we're complaining.

Q. MORE CARS?
Indeed there are, all officially licensed by Ferrari. Four are on offer initially (including the Testarossa, F50 and Enzo), with another four locked away as hidden extras.

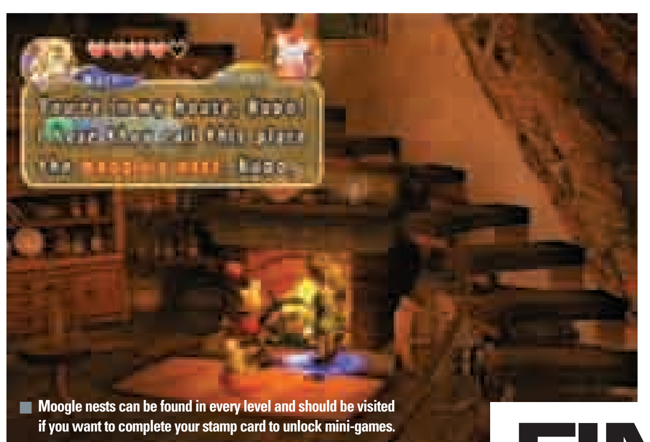
Q. A BIT SIMPLE?
Of course it is, but then it wouldn't be *OutRun* if it wasn't. It's perfect for the arcade and offers playable thrills for a limited time.

The huge boss monsters at the end of each stage take a right beating, even if you do outnumber them…

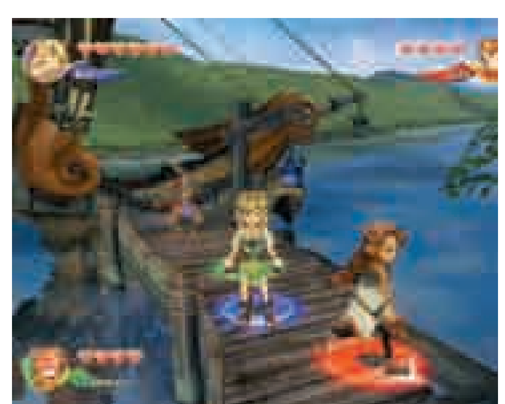




If one of your party dies, make it a priority to revive them as soon as possible.



Moogle nests can be found in every level and should be visited if you want to complete your stamp card to unlock mini-games.



FINAL FANTASY:

Although it's easier if your Moogle carries the Crystal Chalice, he'll only cast spells if it's put down and made vulnerable.

DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
GameCube

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Nintendo

DEVELOPER
The Game Designers Studio

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
11 March

PLAYERS
1-4

FAQs

Q. HOW LONG?
Although you can replay levels over and over to advance the years in the game, it looks like you can play through all the areas available in about 15 hours.

Q. LEVELLING UP?
Picking an artefact from a list after clearing an area, or buying weapons and armour, are the only ways to increase your stats. Killing endless monsters won't do anything besides yielding various items.

Q. SINGLE OR MULTI?
Multiplayer, without a doubt (if you can find the friends willing to play on a regular basis). Without the interaction, the game soon becomes a repetitive hack-and-slash affair.

CRYSTAL CHRONICLES

AREN'T FOUR HEADS MEANT TO BE BETTER THAN ONE?

Two Christmases ago there was a Nintendo television advert for the GameCube doing the rounds. Remember it? We certainly do – if only for the horribly enticing promise of *Final Fantasy: Crystal Chronicles*. It was, according to the advert, 'coming soon'. Of course, we should have realised that the words 'coming soon' don't mean much and here we are – some 16 months later – on the verge of the game arriving on European shores. But has the long wait really been worth it? We suspect that a completely honest answer might surprise you.

You see, we'll admit to buying the Japanese version that came out last year. We've since tried to struggle through it, missing the point of every verbal encounter while still having as much fun as you can when you don't know what's going on. We did hope that once the English translation arrived, all the things we felt were lacking from the Japanese version would mysteriously appear. Unless we've missed something major, though, that doesn't seem to be the case. While we expected some hidden level of depth masked by the language barrier, it turns out that *Crystal Chronicles* really is as shallow as it first appears.

Not that we're saying it's a bad game because of that, you understand; there are several flashes of innovation on show and it's definitely playable if you're willing to persevere. It's just that the way you go about playing *Crystal Chronicles* ultimately dictates what kind of experience you get. With *Final Fantasy* games traditionally being single-player fare, it will probably surprise (and perhaps annoy) fans to learn that *Crystal Chronicles* is anything but a typical *Final Fantasy* title. While it can be played alone, the emphasis is firmly on the multiplayer side – so much so, that the single-player game feels somewhat barren by comparison.

Breaking it down into its most basic elements, *Crystal Chronicles* is certainly comparable to SEGA's *Phantasy Star Online* in terms of gameplay. Set across many self-contained stages, the object is to bash hordes of monsters in real-time, grab items either dropped by monsters or found in chests, and open any doors in your way until you reach the huge guardian at the end of the area and beat him to a quivering pulp. Doesn't exactly sound too exciting, does it? Play it alone and it isn't. Swiftly becoming a repetitive hack-and-slash romp, the lack of anything else to do – like solving puzzles or undertaking side-quests – soon becomes apparent. It's when you bring in additional players (each requiring their own GBA and Link Cable) that the game comes into its own with co-operation, information sharing and a whole lot of shouting helping to build a sense of camaraderie as you plough through each area. Obviously, this was what Square Enix was aiming for, and so in that sense the game works a treat.

Unfortunately, though the multiplayer game is certainly better than the experience offered by playing alone, it has its own flaws that turn what could have been great fun into something lacklustre. For example, the lack of levelling-up combined with the limitless ability to use magic means that it's possible for one player to hang back for the entire level and cast Cure spells on the others instead of attacking, making it possible for even the most gung-ho or careless player to survive most encounters without a scratch. Conversely, the size of the characters on screen combined with the amount of action during the more intense battles makes it difficult to see exactly what's going on much of the time, often resulting in accidental death for at least one player. And as for the use of the GBA to access your inventory, the whole thing is rather redundant. Sure, it leaves the TV free for the other players to see what's happening, but as you can't move your character while accessing the menu everyone's left waiting around until you're finished.

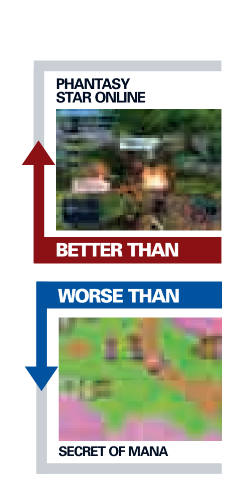
It's a shame really, because while there's no denying this is an above-average game (thanks mostly to the well-crafted visuals, hauntingly melodic music and attempts at innovation), it's fair to say that *Crystal Chronicles* should have been more than it actually is. Where we had hoped for a game that took *Secret Of Mana*'s pleasures of multiplayer adventuring and made them even better, we've been given something playable but lacking much of the flavour you'd expect from a game claiming to be an RPG. Perhaps if Square Enix had tried something a bit more traditional rather than being blinded by Nintendo's claim that connectivity is the way forward, this wouldn't have been the case.

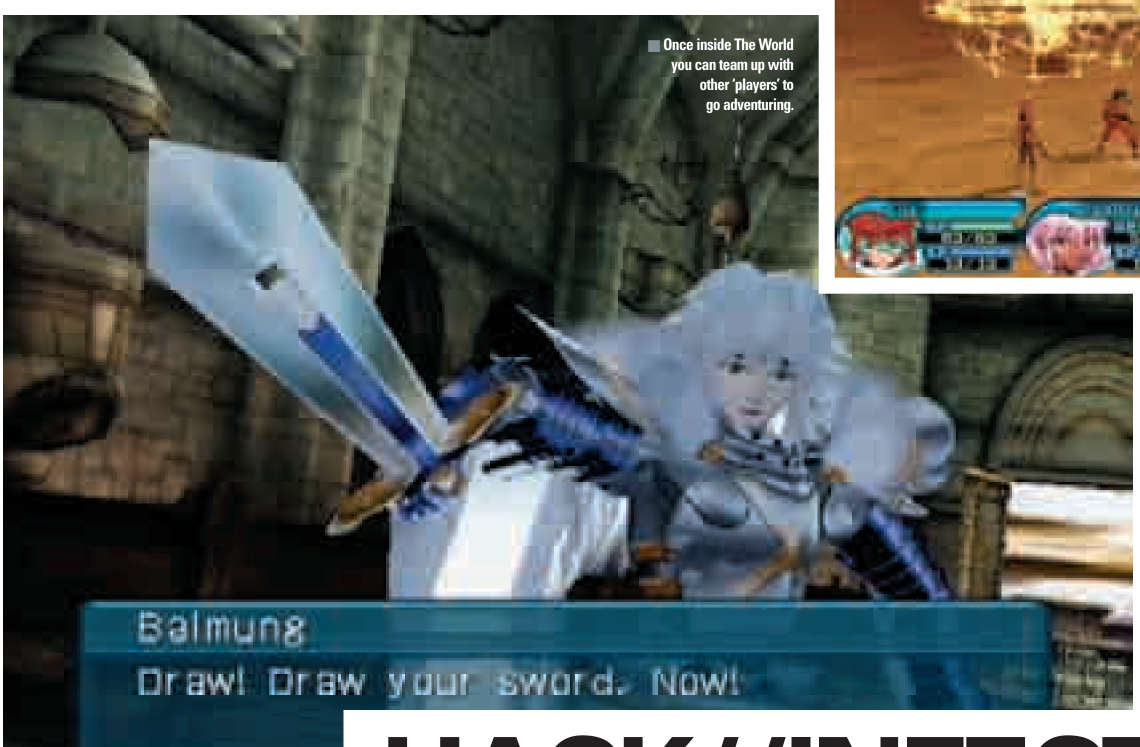


WHAT NO RPG?

***Crystal Chronicles*' biggest problem is that while it attempts to promote itself as an RPG, many of the elements that you'd expect from almost any example of the genre are missing. The decision to remove experience points as a means of levelling up removes any incentive for players to kill enemies in a multiplayer game, while solitary players are left having to use a 'run in, run out' strategy when facing any sort of opposition. The fact that all the other places you can visit (in the form of towns with their own Crystals) hold little in the way of things to do besides listen to pointless comments from the inhabitants is also a sore point, leaving *Crystal Chronicles* as little more than a scrolling slash-'em-up.**







Once inside The World you can team up with other 'players' to go adventuring.



EPHEMERAL FANTASIA



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



DARK CHRONICLE

.HACK//INFECTION

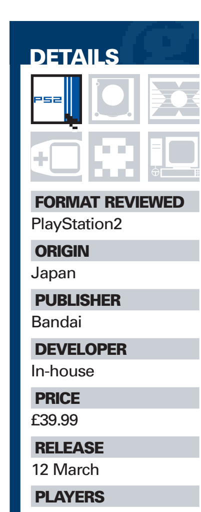
WELCOME TO THE WORLD



Toss your weapons or armour into a Spring Of Myst and they'll change into something new – better *or* worse…

Battles look complex, but simply bash the X button and heal when necessary.

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Bandai

DEVELOPER
In-house

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
12 March

PLAYERS
1

Forget everything you know about massively multiplayer adventuring, this is the world's first MMSPOORPG – or Massively Multiplayer, Single-Player Online/Offline Role-Playing Game. *.hack//Infection* might look like a lot of other MMORPGs (particularly *Phantasy Star Online* and *EverQuest*) and, to be honest, it is pretty similar. But the big catch is that *Infection* is neither massively multiplayer or online – it's all simulated. Unlike other MMORPGs where you're meant to be an adventurer exploring a mystical land for the greater good, the premise of *Infection* is that the world you're exploring isn't real and you're just an end user of the world's biggest-selling MMORPG videogame, rather than some big hero… even though it turns out you actually are. Confused? That's what makes it so intriguing.

From the off *Infection* is laid out as though you're actually playing an MMORPG. Once you've picked your character's names – one for the 'real world' and one for inside The World, the MMORPG where you'll spend most of your time while playing *Infection* – you'll be taken to a desktop-style area where you can read news about real-life events concerning The World, receive emails from people you've met inside The World and start up The World as you would on a PC. Choosing this option then takes you to another screen where you can check out a message board

FINGERPRINT

games™

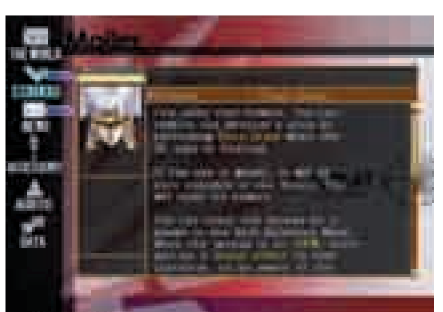
WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

ONLINE OFFLINE: While interacting with other characters can get frustrating, it works to some degree.

WORD PLAY: The word-based system for unlocking levels offers a huge amount of scope for exploration.

OUT OF THIS WORLD

Running around inside The World is enjoyable, but you won't make any progress without the help of other 'players'. There are people playing The World who are way ahead of you and they're often willing to offer some friendly advice – usually through the message board that appears before you log in or via your personal email if that player has agreed to join your team. Not being truly online means that this system is rather limited (you can't post messages on the board or send emails unless the game requires you to, in which case it's done automatically), but it's also fun to boot up the game and find new content waiting for you.





You can interact with other characters but it can be rather limited.



The Drain Data lets you hack into an enemy's programme and change it.



PART 1

for users of The World, a vital source that you'll need to check regularly if you want to find out about new challenges, secrets and other information from fellow 'players'. With that out of the way, you can finally log into The World and that's where things start making far more sense. Sort of.

The World is pretty straightforward – main town areas (or 'server hubs') have shops to visit; levels are teeming with monsters to bash and chests to open; characters collect experience points that enable them to level up at various intervals and so on. Being an MMORPG, though (if only a simulated one), there are plenty of other characters around for you to interact with – although this mostly comes down to 'I'll give you this if you give me that'. The levels are also suitably MMORPG-esque, being slightly generic and faceless affairs where you roam around either huge open expanses dotted with landmarks or dungeon chambers that look remarkably similar to each other, despite being different shapes and sizes.

However, while *Infection* doesn't do much to improve what we've already seen in the genre, there's some quality in how it goes about trying to replicate the more important elements of the MMORPG experience in an offline, single-player environment. Building up your contacts by mailing them or inviting them to join you if they're online, for instance, works surprisingly well, even though it's all AI-controlled and ultimately rather limited. Being able to randomly leap between levels by combining key words also opens up a huge amount of scope for exploration and character improvement, meaning that while the admittedly rich and detailed storyline takes you in a fairly rigid direction, you can still do your own thing. And then there's the hacking concept – from the basic gate hacking required to leap between servers to the more advanced Data Draining that allows you to 'hack' enemy game code and delve further into the program, it's enough to keep you interested through the more generic parts of the game.

Considering we're always saying that games should be able to to make you forget you're playing a game, you might think it odd that we don't condemn *Infection*. That it makes no bones about the fact that you're in a game doesn't make it less of an experience – indeed, it's one of the few things that saves *Infection* from being a run-of-the-mill RPG. It's not the greatest example of the genre in terms of complexity or variety, but the story and gameplay are creative enough to make this stand out from the glut of average PS2 RPGs.

FAQs

Q. IS IT ONLINE?
No. Despite looking just like an MMORPG, all the other characters in the game are AI-controlled.

Q. KEYWORDS?
You can choose keywords from a set list, which expands as you learn new ones. String three together and it opens up a new level. Of course, it might be a really difficult one if you do it randomly.

Q. HOW LONG?
Although there's a set route through the game, the scope for going off at a tangent is pretty massive. And don't forget that this is just the first part of a four-part saga…

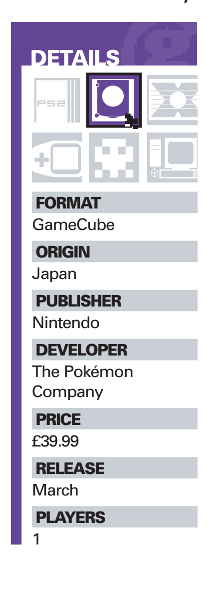


VERDICT 6/10
INFECTIOUS, IF A LITTLE BASIC AT TIMES



POKÉMON CHANNEL

THE FIRST CUBE POKÉMON TITLE FINALLY ARRIVES BUT, ER, WHAT DOES IT DO?



DETAILS

FORMAT
GameCube

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Nintendo

DEVELOPER
The Pokémon Company

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
March

PLAYERS
1

How much longer can Nintendo keep its monster-hungry public waiting for a fully fledged Pokémon adventure? We know *Colosseum* (reaching us this summer) has its Story mode to keep us sated for a good few hours, but the promise of a full-blown, life-ruining Pokémon RPG is just too appealing to let go. We're continually fobbed off with all manner of Poké-cash-ins, and as amusing and enjoyable as some of them are, none can approach the glory of the Game Boy series; a slightly worrying trend that continues with the bizarre *Pokémon Channel*.

Given *Channel's* apparent gearing towards a younger audience, there's a surprising amount of enjoyment to be had with the simple concept. It's what would be best described as a family game, and much of the content – provided you're not deeply offended by the cast of nearly 400 creatures – will entertain players of all ages. Your basic aim is to track down the Pokémon Channel's missing shows so they can go back on air the next day, and there's a real feeling of accomplishment and excitement as you look forward to the fresh programmes – not since *Animal Crossing* have we had to fight the urge to change the internal clock and cheat the system. Unfortunately, this only happens a handful of times and before you know it you'll have access to every show the Channel offers. And even after that you probably won't want to watch most of them more than a couple of times.

Sadly, *Channel's* simplicity is its undoing, and while it pulls every trick in the book to give the impression of depth and longevity (card collecting, limited daily play and so forth), it is at times woefully shallow. Again like *Animal Crossing*, it's not long before you find yourself repeating the same tasks every day just to make your room look pretty or to stock up on the insane amount of tat that Squirtle tries to sell you. As limiting as it may be, the re-creation of the Pokémon universe is a delightfully escapist one, but after the first week or so it'll take some serious staying power to keep coming back to your yellow friend. Great while it lasts but too barren to keep a more fulfilling title out of your Cube for long.

■ Pikachu quickly develops his own favourite channels, which can be quite annoying once he learns how to change channels.



games™

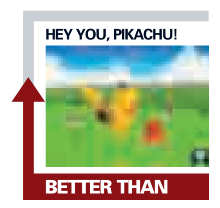
FUSED

BRINGING GENRES TOGETHER

TAMAGOTCHI: You need to combine keeping Pikachu happy…

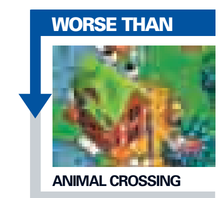
WORK: … with doing the job Oak has asked you to do – checking out the many channels.

HEY YOU, PIKACHU!



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



ANIMAL CROSSING

VERDICT 4/10

A BLAST IN THE SHORT TERM BUT LITTLE MORE



■ If a Magnemite sees you outside, you may well end up on TV yourself…

■ There are plenty of crazy events in which Pikachu can get involved – it pays to go exploring.


eMag









FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox

OTHER FORMATS
PC

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
Eidos

DEVELOPER
Ion Storm

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
3 March
(US: Out Now)

PLAYERS
1



DEUS EX: INVISIBLE WAR

DEUS EX IS BACK, BETTER AND WORSE THAN EVER BEFORE…

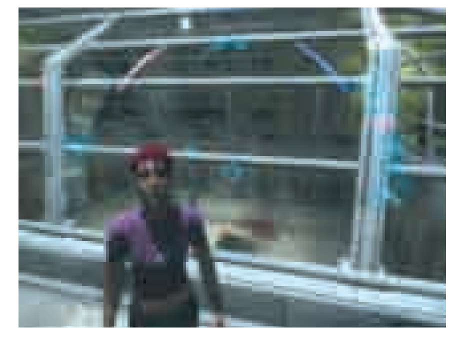
With *Deus Ex: Invisible War*, Ion Storm has taken the art of making a reviewer's life difficult to a whole new level. We pride ourselves on wringing every drop of potential out of a game before delivering our verdict, but with the credits finally rolling on the sequel to one of the greatest PC titles ever created we were under no illusion that despite our best efforts we'd seen a mere fraction of what this work of genius has to offer. With terms like 'replay value' and 'multi-branching stories' bandied about so readily these days this may sound like a cliché, but with *DE:IW* we really could be talking about a completely different game to that experienced by another player in terms of missions undertaken, areas explored, relationships forged and how satisfying a solution was found to each task. So back we went to entangle ourselves in the astonishingly rich tapestry of possibilities, taking as divergent a path as possible and finding a series of new avenues we didn't even know existed.

The game's countless interweaving pathways will stand out as one of the year's most impressive design achievements, offering a mind-boggling array of routes while readjusting the world to the player's every action. With a choice of maybe 12 mission offers on your to-do list at a time – most of them optional, many with conflicting consequences, and all involving multiple solutions – accounting for every eventuality must have been a monumental task, and it creates an unprecedented level of freedom. Think the multi-branching pathways and incidental secondary quests from *Knights Of The Old Republic*, multiplied by a new level of interdependent consequence, then married with the open-ended gameplay of the first *Deus Ex* and you're close to *DE:IW*s recipe for perfection. Sadly, the result isn't quite so clear-cut. In fact, a shoddy opening sets the kind of first impressions that could well have disillusioned gamers throwing in the towel before the masterpiece beneath is revealed in its true glory. Let us try to explain…

The dynamic lighting not only casts a pleasing glow over the world, but also enhances the look of textures.

The Flamethrower's Napalm Blast function is a favourite for taking your enemies down in one easy move.





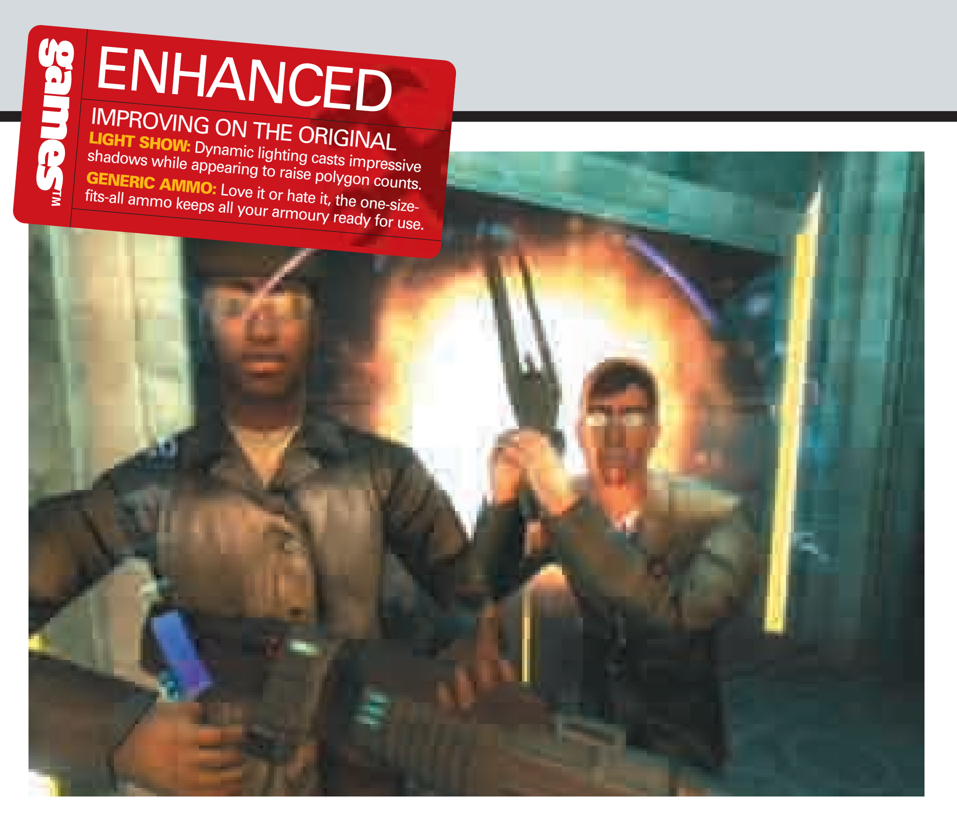


ENHANCED

IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

LIGHT SHOW: Dynamic lighting casts impressive shadows while appearing to raise polygon counts.

GENERIC AMMO: Love it or hate it, the one-size-fits-all ammo keeps all your armoury ready for use.

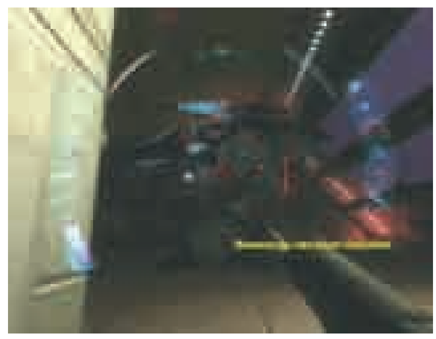






TOOLING UP

One of the factions you'd do best to get yourself on good terms with is the band of mysterious weapon dealers known as the Omar. Running errands for them and not harming their interests should get you mates' rates on some fearsome black-market Biomods. The Bot Domination mod allows you to take direct control of various bots and turrets, while the Neural Interface lets you disable entire security networks. As for weaponry, we wouldn't waste our hard-earned credits. Scouring environments (and bins) should turn up plenty of firepower but, in a world where every action has a consequence, be careful who you use it on.



The whole screen shakes when these bad boys start strutting around. You'd probably best stick to the shadows.

PC £34.99 5 MARCH



It's obvious this was designed for the Xbox, no doubt annoying the first game's PC fans. You'll need to exceed the minimum spec before this is anywhere near playable.

The story begins in Seattle, which, aside from being home to some of the most dreary and claustrophobic environments in the game, highlights *DE:IW*s shortcomings as an FPS. Inexplicably, the perfectly adequate dynamics of the previous game have been dumbed down for the sequel, incorporating a damage system that isn't location-specific. You can dish out several shots to the head from your feeble starter kit of weaponry before your foes finally hit the deck, resulting in some clumsy and unsatisfying confrontations. Along with this baffling step backwards for the series, we only get bite-sized glimpses of the freedom on offer while a seemingly crude choice of routes around tasks misleadingly depicts a watered-down, rather than souped-up, *Deus Ex*.

By the end of your time in Seattle, however, you should have amassed a toolkit of equipment, weapon mods and special abilities for use in the compulsory mission ahead. Despite having the freeform RPG adventuring element briefly removed from the equation, for us this section proved to be the game's turning point as we were reminded of everything that made the original so great. Arriving at a top-secret facility, a classic *Deus Ex*-style network of security cameras, turrets, patrol bots and guards stands between you and your objective, requiring you to make full use of your equipment and the alternative routes on offer to succeed. Those horrid toe-to-toe shoot-outs become a thing of the past as you employ your Thermal Masking Biomod to evade bots; Neural Interface to hack the camera network; and silenced Sniper Rifle to take out guards. Or you could just use any of the other tools you've assembled in your unique repertoire.

The next major city on your tour is where *DE:IW* finally begins to deliver almost everything we'd hoped it could be. The jaw-dropping scope for your decisions to sculpt such diverse adventures is clear to see, and the incredible box of tricks at your disposal leaves the gameplay style to your discretion. It may have taken three hours to get here, but rest assured the rewards from hereon in are little short of breathtaking…

FAQs

Q. HOW LONG?
How long is a piece of string? With so many secondary objectives to explore or ignore you can be as brief or thorough as you like.

Q. ONE-SHOT KILLS?
The Sniper Rifle is the only gun that can inflict location-specific damage, but Grenades and Flamethrowers can also bring down foes instantly thus avoiding any unpleasant lengthy engagements.

Q. CONVERSATION PIECE?
Even incidental NPCs have a number of responses in their repertoire to avoid repeating themselves.

VERDICT 8/10
EARLY FLAWS GIVE WAY TO A MASTERPIECE

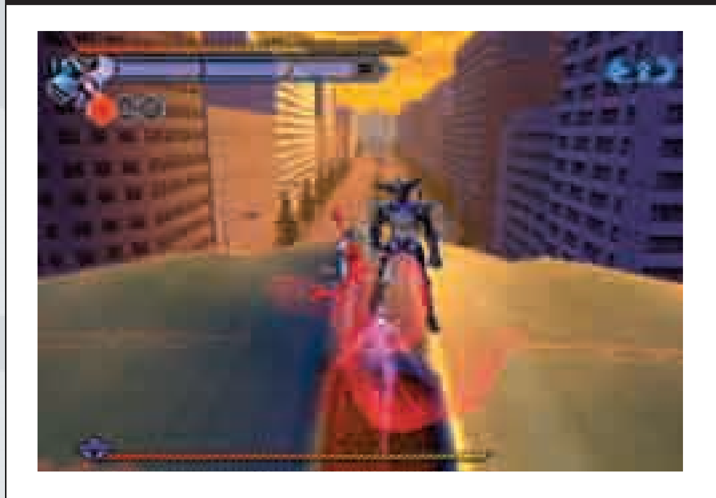
ARX FATALIS

BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



DEUS EX





DETALLS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
SEGA

DEVELOPER
SEGA WOW

PRICE
£29.99

RELEASE
5 March
(Japan: Out Now)

PLAYERS
1

WILL LIGHTNING STRIKE TWICE FOR SEGA'S REVIVED FRANCHISE?

NIGHTSHADE

While we're not always happy when a classic 2D title steps into the third dimension, we're pleasantly surprised with SEGA's latest franchise revival. Sure, *Nightshade* isn't going to win any awards for innovation or visual flair, but it does deliver extremely solid and frenetic old-school gameplay.

With *Shinobi*'s lead, Hotsuma, mysteriously disappearing, it's down to female recruit Hibana to unravel the resurrection of *Shinobi*'s deadly Hellspawn and find the missing warrior. Hibana easily matches Dante and the Prince of Persia for sheer athleticism and style – running along walls, pulling off deadly combos and dispatching squads of Nakatomi Ninjas looks effortless – and everything about *Nightshade* screams improvement; there are now 13 levels, the graphics engine has had an overhaul and *Shinobi*'s intuitive control system feels much tighter.

With all these tweaks, it's good to see that the game's Tate system has received just as much care and attention.

As before, a defeated enemy will briefly freeze, allowing Hibana a moment to trounce her next opponent. Kill enough enemies on the trot and a cut-scene shows your defeated foes succumbing to Hibana's skills in a suitably bloody fashion. Thanks to some well-thought-out enemy placement the Tate system is an important part of the game, with later levels letting experienced players pull off some devastating combos.

Admittedly, most gamers will complete *Nightshade* within a weekend – it's a fine example of style over substance. But this game is all about its scoring system and it offers plenty of incentives to ensure that you'll be going back for just one more go. *Nightshade* is far from perfect and still suffers from a lacklustre plot and a sometimes unfair difficulty level, but these are minor niggles that rarely detract from the gameplay. This is one franchise we wouldn't mind seeing more of.

games™ ENHANCED
IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL
BETTER LOOKING: Thanks to its leading lady and improved engine *Nightshade* is pretty attractive.
KEY EXTRAS: Hidden characters and new suits are just a few of the unlockables within the game.

VERDICT 7/10
A WORTHY SEQUEL THAT IMPROVES ON THE ORIGINAL

SHINOBI

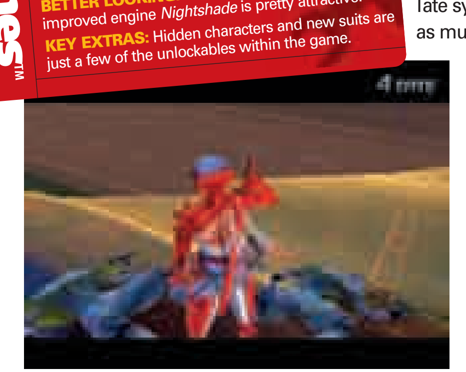


BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



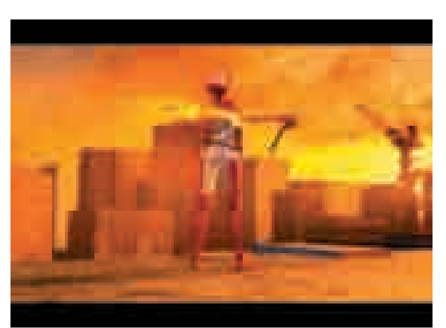
DEVIL MAY CRY



She might look silly, but Hibana is extremely dangerous. Laugh at her and she'll cut you into little pieces.



Kicking guided missiles towards a Stealth Fighter is nothing unusual for a ninja in a Power Rangers costume…



Nightshade's cut-scenes certainly look impressive, so it's a shame that the plot is so poor

GOBLIN COMMANDER: UNLEASH THE HORDE

JALECO UNLEASHES A NEW BREED OF RTS ON THE CONSOLE MARKET

DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox

OTHER FORMATS
PS2, GameCube

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
Jaleco

DEVELOPER
In-House

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-2

Let's face it, if you're a fan of real-time strategy there's only one platform capable of catering for your every gaming need. Yet while the PC section of any games store will generally contain enough RTS goodness to satisfy the largest of warmongering appetites, you'd have to scour the console shelves with a fine-toothed comb to turn up any evidence of the genre. There are plenty of good reasons for this – even the mighty *Age Of Empires* struggled to impress when condemned to a gamepad control scheme. But news that Ron and Chris Millar of *WarCraft* fame were attempting to introduce a new level of accessibility and energetic pacing to the formula with *Goblin Commander* filled us with hope that the RTS would finally find a home with console gamers.

Sadly, there's a fine line between toning down the traditionally intimidating tactical elements for a more action-hungry market and completely altering the acronym to 'Ruddy Tedious Scrapping', a line that *Goblin Commander* clumsily ignores. It becomes near impossible to attach any kind of strategic approach to your Goblins' mindless marauding, particularly during the first few missions when your 'horde' is limited to a single inseparable regiment of just ten units. In addition to your tiny band of ranged and melee units up to three defensive turrets and a lone Titan is the limit of your arsenal. While later levels eventually place two more Goblin regiments under your command, the maximum number of independent entities you'll be orchestrating around the battlefield never exceeds four (one Titan and three regiments). At full strength it is just about possible to inject a hint of strategy into the otherwise gung-ho skirmishes, but gameplay is ultimately designed to reward brawn rather than brains.

Ironically, the developer has actually been very successful in mapping a superbly intuitive control system to the gamepad, and by enabling direct control of your Titan a basic action element is introduced. Yet by totally amputating any strategic scope from the RTS equation the ensuing battles become virtually pointless affairs.



STARSHIP TROOPERS



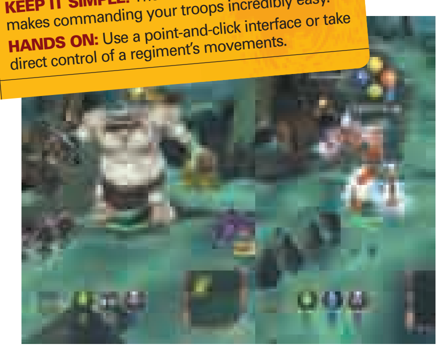
BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



AGE OF EMPIRES

FINGERPRINT
WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE
KEEP IT SIMPLE: The innovative control scheme makes commanding your troops incredibly easy.
HANDS ON: Use a point-and-click interface or take direct control of a regiment's movements.





With both ranged and melee units in one regiment, battles are largely beyond tactical control and lack strategic depth.

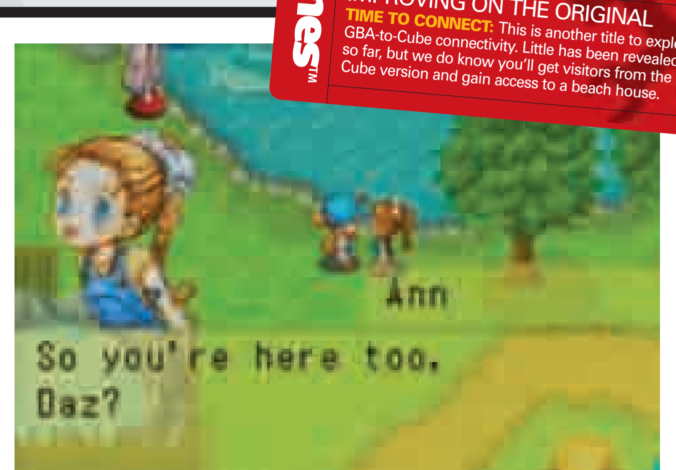


Your Titan can replenish its health by scoffing enemies, but it can just as easily grab the wrong Goblins and start snacking on your own troops. And when you've only got a handful of regiments at your disposal you don't really want to lose men in the field.

games™ ENHANCED
IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

TIME TO CONNECT: This is another title to exploit GBA-to-Cube connectivity. Little has been revealed so far, but we do know you'll get visitors from the Cube version and gain access to a beach house.





UBISOFT SHOWS US HOW TO SQUEEZE AN ENTIRE FARM INTO ONE TINY CONSOLE

HARVEST MOON: FRIENDS OF MINERAL TOWN

DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
Game Boy Advance

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Ubisoft

DEVELOPER
Natsume

PRICE
£24.99

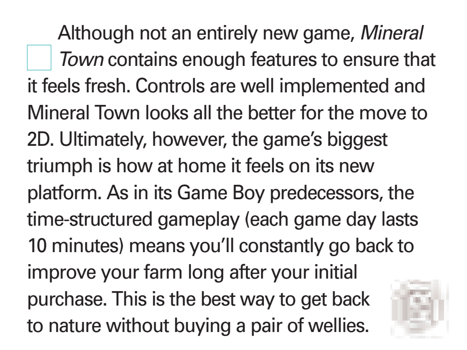
RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1

Nintendo's Game Boy Advance is a deceptive little machine. While it may play host to some of the most generic licences around, its recent releases favour adult intelligence over child-friendly gameplay. This is no more apparent than with the likes of *Final Fantasy Tactics Advance*, *Advance Wars 2* and this latest title from Natsume.

For those who have never experienced a *Harvest Moon* game before, the premise is simple: restore a run-down farm to prosperity while finding true love. Despite the game's lacklustre-sounding goals, *Friends Of Mineral Town* is an absorbingly deep and enjoyable game, even if it does turn out to be little more than a 2D remake of the PlayStation's *Harvest Moon: Back To Nature* (a fact kept annoyingly quiet by Ubisoft and Natsume). Fortunately, many gamers won't have played the previous incarnation, so this new iteration is the perfect excuse to find out what all the fuss is about.

Upon inheriting your new home, you'll have your work cut out. Fields need to be cleared and tilled, livestock must be bought and tended, and one of six girls needs to be wooed. Initially, the game can be quite tough as you'll spend the majority of your time using maximum effort to raise minimal amounts of money. But before long, your funds build and you can use your new fortune to buy gifts for the girls and improve your house and farm. Despite all this hard graft, *Friends Of Mineral Town* is extremely rewarding and you'll become engrossed in your digital life. As each year progresses, seasons change, courtships are developed and there's even the odd mini-game to enjoy – it all adds up to one of the most immersive experiences GBA owners have so far witnessed.

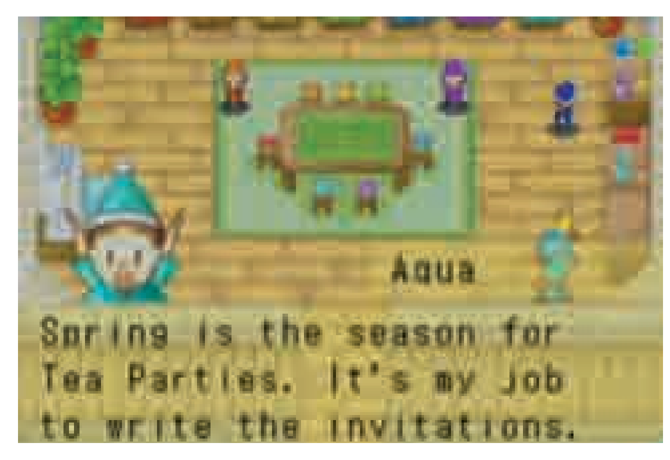


Although not an entirely new game, *Mineral Town* contains enough features to ensure that it feels fresh. Controls are well implemented and Mineral Town looks all the better for the move to 2D. Ultimately, however, the game's biggest triumph is how at home it feels on its new platform. As in its Game Boy predecessors, the time-structured gameplay (each game day lasts 10 minutes) means you'll constantly go back to improve your farm long after your initial purchase. This is the best way to get back to nature without buying a pair of wellies.

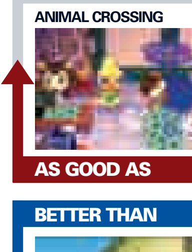


VERDICT 8/10
YOU'LL BE PLAYING THIS TILL THE COWS COME HOME

Behind the church are seven Elves. If you befriend them they'll play mini-games and help you manage your farm.



ANIMAL CROSSING



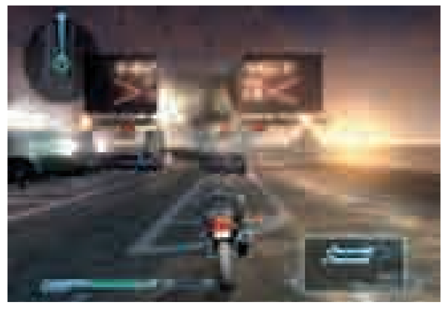
AS GOOD AS

BETTER THAN



LEGEND OF THE RIVER KING


eMag

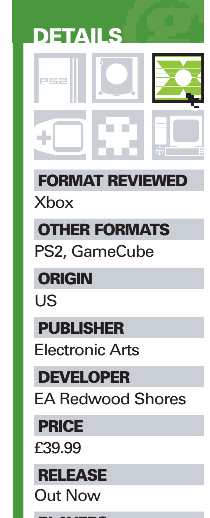

Using the Q-Bike can be exhilarating, though jumps can be frustrating.


When the lights go out you'll need to use your Thermographic Vision.



JAMES BOND 007: EVERYTHING OR NOTHING

SORRY, JAMES – YOU'LL HAVE TO MAKE DO WITH SOMETHING IN BETWEEN



DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox
OTHER FORMATS
PS2, GameCube
ORIGIN
US
PUBLISHER
Electronic Arts
DEVELOPER
EA Redwood Shores
PRICE
£39.99
RELEASE
Out Now
PLAYERS
1-4

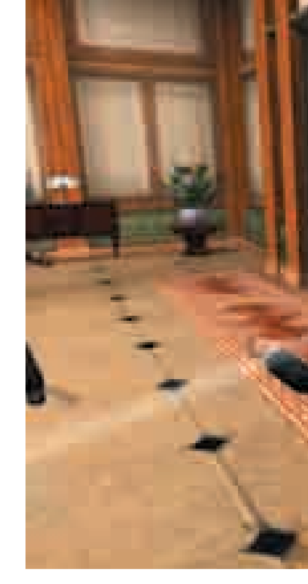
Having already secured the rights to produce games based on the *James Bond* franchise until the end of the decade, EA's decision to give the series a makeover seems like a good idea – if only because it prevents us from moaning about each title being recycled pap. We'd like to think that such a revamp would create a Bond game of such high quality that we'd all be taken aback – something that has yet to happen, even though this fifth attempt at creating the definitive Bond adventure tries to convince us otherwise.

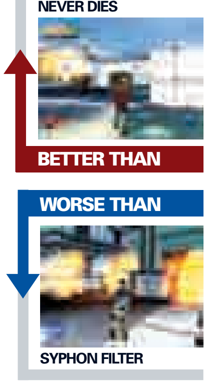
That isn't to say that EA isn't on the right track, as first impressions suggest that *EON* certainly has plenty going for it… on the surface, at least. Highest on the list of priorities has clearly been the creation of a faithful Bond atmosphere; something that EA has admittedly pulled off with more than a fair amount of success. Indeed, it's no surprise that much of the game – particularly the dramatic opening, complete with obligatory theme tune over the credit sequence and other cut-scenes – genuinely feels like a real Bond movie. Thanks to a decent enough story written specifically for the game (one that actually ties into a proper Bond movie, albeit *A View To A Kill*), and backed up by an impressive roster of acting talent, EA clearly wants *EON* to be the most authentic Bond game yet.

Of course, all this is just window dressing for what is essentially an effort to take the franchise in a new direction. The fact that *EON* does away with the FPS style that most people associate with Bond games these days is a bold move and, generally, it works quite well. Bond himself now has much more of a Sam Fisher feel about him, with all the requisite moves. Yet despite the new third-person perspective giving EA more scope to improve – or at least change – the Bond concept, we're still in two minds about the game as a whole. Strangely, the reasons for our indecision aren't anything to do with this change in perspective (which, to be honest, brings something new to the table) but more because of the game's other annoying quirks.

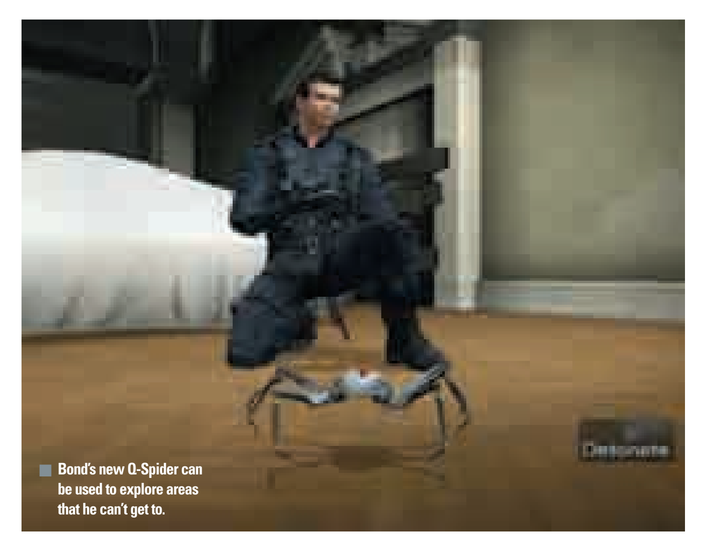
Perhaps it's because *EON* tries to be too clever for its own good by throwing in elements for the hell of it, rather than having them do anything that enhances the gameplay. Certainly, some neat additions like being able to tweak your aim once you're locked onto an enemy work a treat, but the fact that the lock-on system itself is rather inconsistent negates that somewhat. Some of Bond's new gadgets, such as Thermographic Vision and the Rappel, seem to be there simply for the wow factor rather than affecting how you play; gimmick factor aside, they don't have much use outside where the game insists you do so. What's more, the vehicle sections (of which there are a few too many) aren't nearly as strong as the third-person stages thanks to some shaky controls on all the vehicles bar the Q Bike, and even that only just makes it into the 'alright' category.

And then there's the age-old complaint of death for the sake of death, as *EON* seems to take great pleasure in killing you over and over. To say that




TOMORROW NEVER DIES
BETTER THAN
WORSE THAN
SYPHON FILTER





Bond's new Q-Spider can be used to explore areas that he can't get to.

FAQs

Q. JUST LIKE A FILM?
There's high-quality voice acting and cut-scenes, but the plot's hackneyed. Just like the films, then.

Q. MAN VS CAR?
There are almost as many vehicle-based levels are there are with Bond, which unbalances the game. Sadly, the vehicle levels aren't the game's strongest point.

Q. BOND MOMENTS?
Think the Bond moves of the last two games – pull them off and you'll look like a real spy. Sadly, some are inconsistent, others are just obscure.



Bond can now dive around to avoid his enemies while firing, though he's no Max Payne.

ENHANCED

IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

MAGIC MOMENT: Bond moments look cool and give you an advantage over your enemies too.

GO GO GADGET: The new Q-Spider and RC Car let you explore where Bond normally couldn't go.

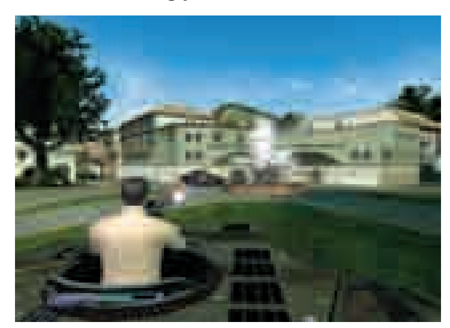
the game doesn't always play fair isn't far off the mark, as it often throws curve balls that can lead to you dying in an instant – enemies spawning from areas that you've previously cleared out and assumed are safe, men with all-powerful rocket launchers appearing out of nowhere and so on. Then again, such elements are always scripted and so this turns the game into something of a memory test, with keen-minded players being able to repeatedly replay stages until they can scrape through to the next, rather than being spontaneous.

And so we're left with a dilemma; on one hand, we're impressed with how EA is attempting to evolve the franchise and keep things fresh, but on the other, we're not entirely convinced that *EON* is the huge step forward that EA is proclaiming it to be. With just as many levels where you'll pray for it to be over than where you're actually having fun, the game turns out to be a mixture of styles that don't meld together as solidly as they should, as well as having several frustrating joypad-throwing moments and often demanding extraordinary feats of memory from the player. It's certainly a step up from the rather stagnant FPS rut in which Bond was getting trapped, and it wins the award for being closest to the movies, but its remaining flaws stop this from being the *GoldenEye* beater we're still waiting for.

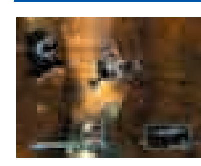
VERDICT 5/10
ATMOSPHERIC, BUT STILL LACKING IN KEY PLACES

SPIES LIKE US

Head into the multiplayer side of *EON* and you'll find various types of gameplay: the obvious four players blasting each other to pieces, as well as two fighting to get the highest score, racing against the clock to complete stages or, most interestingly, working together through several missions not found in the main game. This co-op style is fairly well-implemented and offers something new for people looking for a break from the single-player game. But why is the main all-against-all battle mode locked to begin with, only becoming available once you've cleared the co-op mode? And why isn't Bond usable in multiplayer, even as a hidden character? Talk about shooting yourself in the foot…

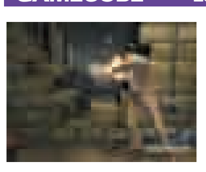


PLAYSTATION2 £39.99 OUT NOW

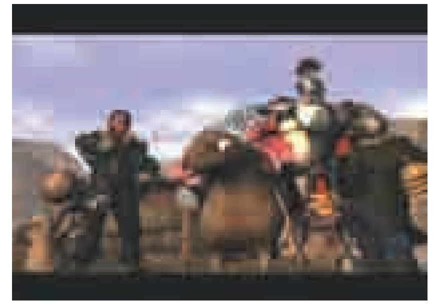


Undoubtedly the one that will sell big numbers, even though it doesn't look anywhere near as nice compared to the Xbox. The loading time is a tiny bit longer as well.

GAMECUBE £39.99 OUT NOW



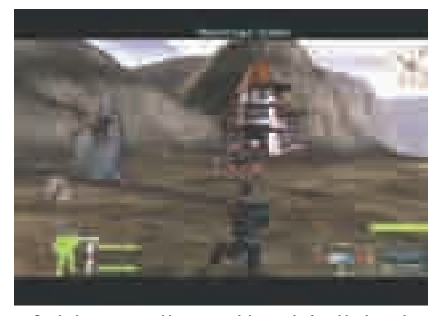
The usual control issues aside, the GameCube version actually does a fairly good job of keeping pace with the Xbox's game – even if it doesn't look quite as crisp and sharp.



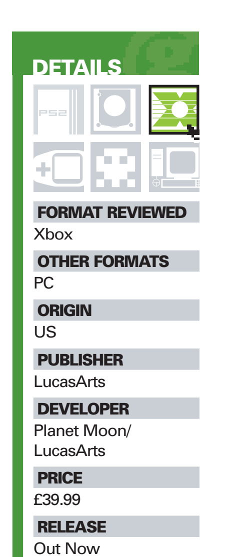
Hilarious cut-scenes provide an unlikely incentive to persevere.



Amusing as your companions are, they're pretty useless in a firefight.



Comical weapons provide an entertaining respite from blasting action.



DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox

OTHER FORMATS
PC

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
LucasArts

DEVELOPER
Planet Moon/ LucasArts

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1

IT'S A FUNNY OLD GAME, BUT IS IT ACTUALLY ANY GOOD?

ARMED AND DANGEROUS

games™ FINGERPRINT

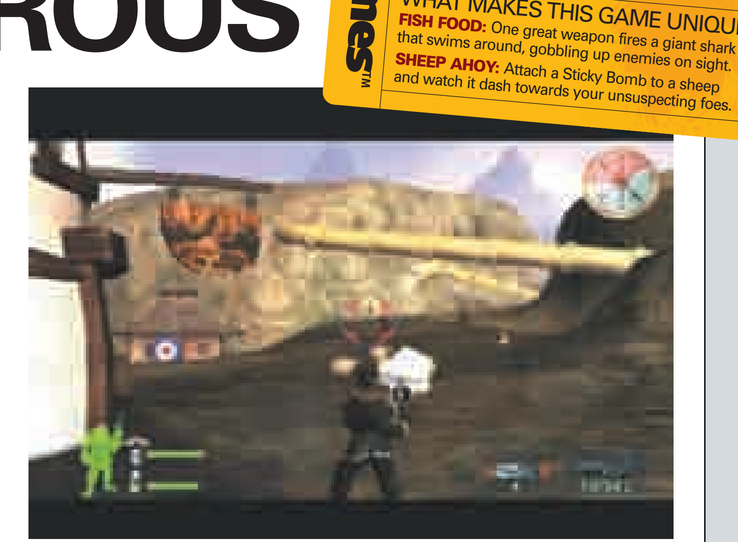
WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

FISH FOOD: One great weapon fires a giant shark that swims around, gobbling up enemies on sight.

SHEEP AHOY: Attach a Sticky Bomb to a sheep and watch it dash towards your unsuspecting foes.

Fun has become such an underrated commodity in videogames these days. In a market of ever-shifting technological boundaries and heavy saturation, auxiliary components like frame rates and textures are fast replacing good old entertainment value as the acid test for quality. So following some encouraging early glimpses of Planet Moon and LucasArts' incredibly light-hearted blast-fest *Armed And Dangerous*, we were determined to cast aside such pretentious empirical nit-picking and base our evaluation of the game purely on how fun it was to play. Yes, we knew its structure would embrace the gaming faux pas of linearity; that the modest visual style was unlikely to set the world alight; and that – hilarious flashes of wit aside – the run-'n'-gun gameplay would in all probability have less originality about it than a Travis song, yet still we clung to our faith that LucasArts wouldn't let us down when it came to sheer enjoyment. Sadly, we were wrong.

Rather than harnessing the exhilarating quick-blast appeal promised by its cheery all-action formula, the game instead compounds the problems of an inherently shallow structure with some horribly bland delivery. A relentless conveyor belt of cannon fodder ensures the carnage is kept at a suitably frantic rate, yet with every wave of cookie-cutter enemies thrown to the mercy of your crosshair, repetition becomes an increasingly prevalent factor. Your countless adversaries are rarely alive long enough for their primitive AI to have much effect on play, though your two companions' similar lack of common sense unhelpfully condemns them to an existence as useful as chocolate teapots.



Enemies? Blast them. Sheep? Blow them up too. Anything else that moves? Might as well shoot it while you're at it…

Unremarkable and overly basic as the core blasting may be, there is a reasonable amount of satisfaction to be derived from the action's blistering pace and larger-than-life body count, while a couple of superb special weapons serve up some much-needed mood-lightening moments of genius. And then there are the cut-scenes. The largely British cast delivers a host of unrestrained mini-sketches with impeccable comedy timing and, though these feel somewhat detached from the core trigger-tapping action, they do provide a welcome light at the end of the more mundane levels.



DUKE NUKEM: TIME TO KILL

BETTER THAN

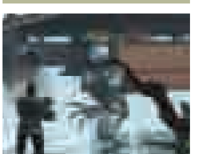
WORSE THAN

HALO

VERDICT 4/10

BLAND BLASTING, ENRICHED WITH COMEDY

PC £29.99 OUT NOW



The keyboard/mouse control system is slightly better suited to the frantic pace of blasting, while the rather basic visuals don't undergo much improvement aside from slightly less fogging.

DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox

OTHER FORMATS
PlayStation2

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
Midway

DEVELOPER
Angel Studios

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
5 March

PLAYERS
1-2

WE SPY WITH OUR LITTLE EYE, SOMETHING BEGINNING WITH 'S'…

SPYHUNTER 2





CONNECTED

EXPANDING THE GAMEPLAY

BACK SEAT: Co-op mode is farcical – the second player only gets to 'control' the secondary weapons.
SPY VS SPY: The two-player deathmatch isn't that bad, though it's certainly not that good either…

Damn you, Midway – damn you to hell. We though that *SpyHunter 2* might be okay; that it would improve on the original's shortcomings to produce a superior game, what with the first *SpyHunter* update being a decent (if short-lived) car-based blasting romp. But what do you give us? A horribly watered-down and bland-looking follow-up, lacking virtually all the flavour of the first game and with a new set of flaws to moan about.

You'd be hard-pressed to notice the problems in *SpyHunter 2* from these screenshots, looking as similar to the previous game as they do – though that's a flaw in itself because this instalment should look so much better. Sadly, it doesn't – in fact, the horrendous amount of pop-up and the incredibly flat texturing on everything but the vehicles would indicate that it's worse. That, however, is only part of why *SpyHunter 2* is so bad. It's only once you begin to explore the gameplay that you realise just how shallow it is.

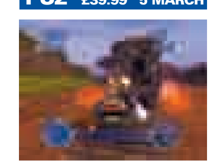
For instance, the structure of each level is now nowhere near as complex as it was, even though it was fairly simple in the first place. The basic stage objectives still remain, but all the things that gave you a reason to repeatedly return to each mission have disappeared. The hidden SATCOM tokens; the bonus objectives that require you to venture out of your way; even the chance to earn rewards depending on how quickly you complete a mission – all gone. Add the fact that the game's 16 missions can be completed within a day (even though some incredibly unfair sections attempt to stop you doing so) and this will be back in the box before you know it.

And there are more technical problems, from cars breaking up and disappearing as soon as you destroy them, to a complete inability to hit enemies while on water when you are in Escape Cycle mode. How did things like that get missed? But then if quality control was an issue, we doubt *SpyHunter 2* would have passed the planning stage. The only good thing about this game is it makes us want to play the original *SpyHunter*. Now *that* was a game…



NO, MR MIDWAY, WE EXPECT THIS TO DIE





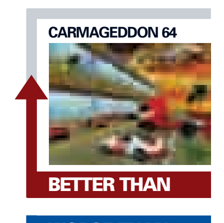
The lack of excessive reflection effects makes the PS2 version look flatter than its Xbox cousin. To be fair, though, they both play as badly as each other…

Fighting enemies on water is fine if you're using the car, but it's nigh-on impossible when using the Escape Cycle.





CARMAGEDDON 64

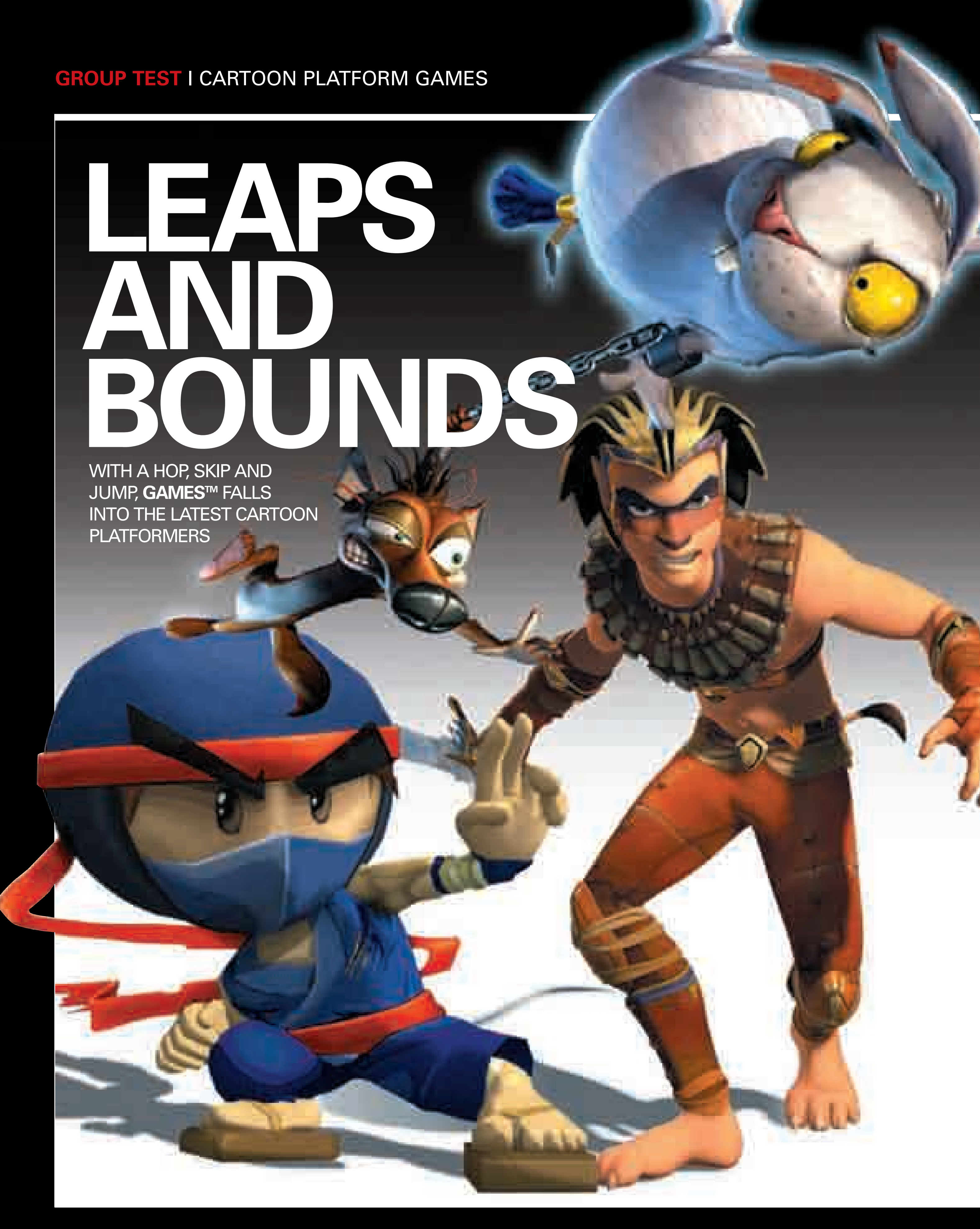


BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



SPYHUNTER



LEAPS AND BOUNDS

WITH A HOP, SKIP AND JUMP, **GAMES™** FALLS INTO THE LATEST CARTOON PLATFORMERS

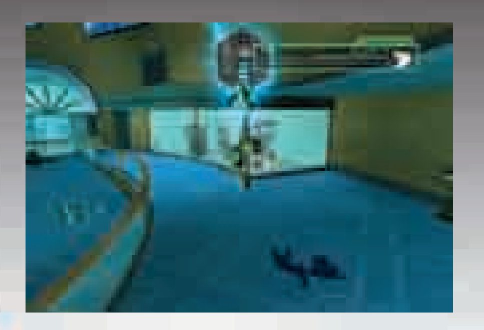
THERE'S A GLUT OF CUTESY PLATFORMERS AVAILABLE ACROSS EVERY FORMAT AT THE MOMENT, SO WE CHECK OUT THREE OF THE MOST PROMISING CANDIDATES

Since the dawn of home gaming, consoles and computers alike have enjoyed (and sometimes endured) a massive selection of platformers. Indeed, along with fighting and racing games, it's easily one of the most (if not the most) saturated genres.

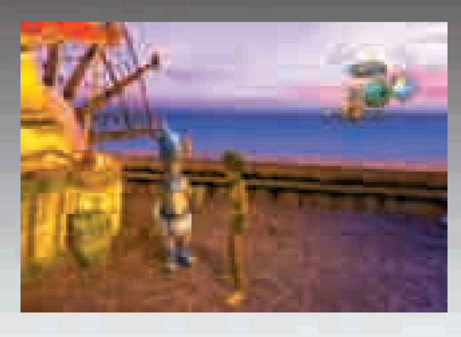
Despite this, however, there's still plenty of magic around should you be prepared to look. The likes of *Mario Sunshine*, *Jak II: Renegade* and *Prince Of Persia: The Sands Of Time* have all added a new spin to a sometimes stagnant genre and now there's a new batch of games all vying for the crown of best platformer.

With titles such as *Tak And The Power Of JuJu* and *Megaman X7* narrowly missing the cut for this review, it's down to a weasel, a rabbit, a mummy, a demi-god and a diminutive ninja to fight it out against a backdrop of Day-glo colours and biting humour. Let battle commence.

PRESENTATION Surely you want to look good while you're jumping?







Whiplash

***Whiplash*'s main reliance is on its scathing humour and frantic gameplay, which are perfectly captured by some outrageous visuals and over-the-top spot effects.** While it feels a bit rough around the edges in places, the dark atmosphere feels refreshingly new. Spanx the weasel and his rabbit sidekick, Redmond, have received most of Crystal Dynamics' care and attention; whether Spanx is filling his buddy's head with helium, or is using the hapless bunny to lay waste to the game's fully destructible levels, they're an absolute joy to watch. The caricatured humans lack the same sophistication, but what's on display is still very good.

I-Ninja

Argonaut's latest title may look rather basic, but don't be fooled, this is a great-looking game once it's on the move. Like *Whiplash* and *Sphinx*, *I-Ninja* runs at a solid 60fps and has its fair share of enjoyable and outlandish characters. The overall design is bold, bright and features good use of primary colours to deliver an engaging experience that wouldn't look out of place on the GameCube (unfortunately, it's a PS2 exclusive for the moment in the UK). I-Ninja and his cartoon foes are extremely well animated and display a wide range of outrageous moves. Add some nifty tunes and you've got a very presentable package.

Sphinx And The Cursed Mummy

***Sphinx* clinches the visuals award by dripping with atmosphere – Eurocom has really captured an ancient Egyptian vibe.** Sphinx and his Mummy cohort are engaging to look at, with the Mummy stealing the show with his various death routines. One of the only faults is that there are sometimes lots of gorgeous but ultimately empty locations, but at least that keeps the frame rate up. It's a shame that the sound isn't quite up to scratch; the tunes are competent, but they highlight the fact that nobody in *Sphinx* talks. A missed opportunity.

DETAILS

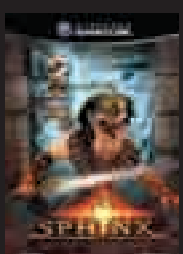


Whiplash

FORMAT:	Xbox, PS2
ORIGIN:	US
PUBLISHER:	Eidos
DEVELOPER:	Crystal Dynamics
PRICE:	£39.99
RELEASE:	Out Now
PLAYERS:	1

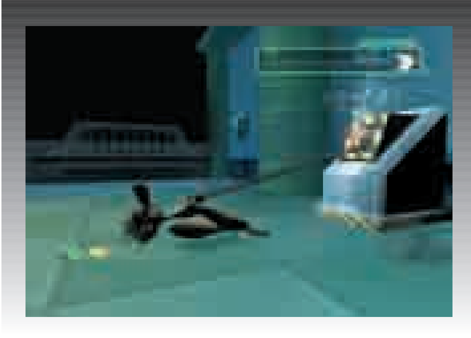
I-Ninja

FORMAT:	PS2
ORIGIN:	UK
PUBLISHER:	SCEE
DEVELOPER:	Argonaut
PRICE:	£39.99
RELEASE:	Out Now
PLAYERS:	1

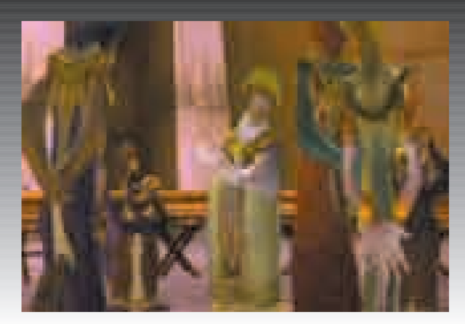


Sphinx And The Cursed Mummy

FORMAT:	GameCube Xbox, PS2
ORIGIN:	UK
PUBLISHER:	THQ
DEVELOPER:	Eurocom
PRICE:	£34.99
RELEASE:	Out Now
PLAYERS:	1







STORY & HUMOUR "Funny how? Funny like a clown?"

Whiplash

***Whiplash*'s story shares quite a few similarities with the classic *Oddworld* series.** Like Abe and co, the stars of *Whiplash* are escaped prisoners who have to liberate their mates. The trade-off here, though, is that they also get to destroy as much of the evil Genron laboratory complex as possible. Thanks to a recent experiment, Redmond is invincible; as a result Spanx uses him to help the duo out of various predicaments. Apart from becoming an impromptu weapon for Spanx to wield, Redmond can also be used to hotwire doors and bridge gaps and is employed in many more bizarre ways. The humour here is of a fairly adult nature and will have you wincing and laughing in equal measure.

I-Ninja

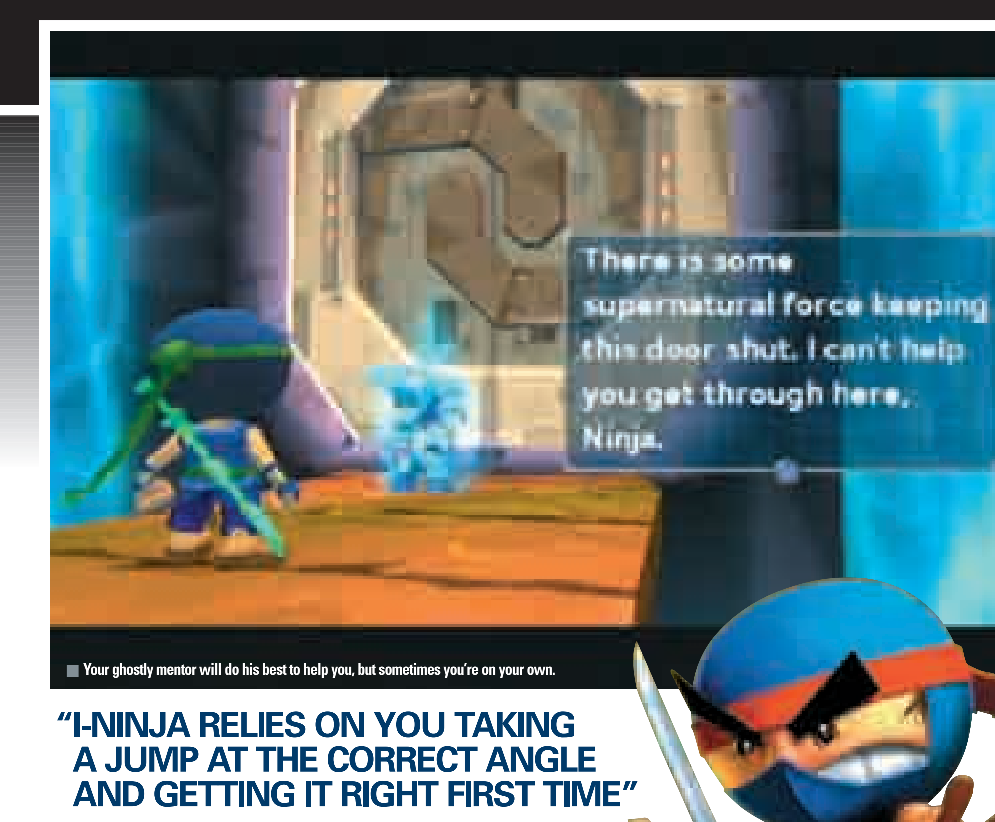
***I-Ninja*'s plot is as flimsy as a house of cards; within moments of the game's opening, you've rescued your mentor from a dangerous dragon, than unwittingly killed the old man after failing to master a Rage Stone.** Fortunately, he isn't one to bear a grudge and returns as a ghost to help you find the remaining missing Stones. In spite of this simple premise, *I-Ninja* succeeds thanks to its pithy one-liners, decent voice casting and continually bubbling humour. *Futurama*'s Billy West voices our hero with aplomb and Argonaut has taken care to ensure that I-Ninja's quips aren't used ad nauseam.

"YOU'LL CARRY ON LAUGHING LONG AFTER WHIPLASH'S PLOT HAS PETERED OUT"

Sphinx

Many parts of *Sphinx* play more like an arcade adventure than a traditional platformer, so it's unsurprising to find it features the strongest story arc. When Pharaoh Tutankhamen gets transformed into the titular Mummy, only the heroic Sphinx can save the day. Along the way are jealous rivals and Tutankhamen's traitorous brother, who constantly seeks to thwart Sphinx's every move and eventually rule the world. *Sphinx*'s humour is unleashed whenever Tutankhamen's Mummy makes an appearance; you'll often find yourself inflicting various tortures upon him (such as setting him on fire or electrocuting him) in order to solve puzzles, and all these sequences are pretty funny. Indeed, watching the hapless Mummy hop from foot to foot as he's engulfed in flames is priceless. What a shame, then, that the whole scene was played out with little more than a few *Banjo*-style mutterings.

■ Spanx and Redmond are chained together, leading to plenty of opportunities for Spanx to hurl his rabbit friend around.



Your ghostly mentor will do his best to help you, but sometimes you're on your own.

"I-NINJA RELIES ON YOU TAKING A JUMP AT THE CORRECT ANGLE AND GETTING IT RIGHT FIRST TIME"

PLATFORM POWER

The best platformers doing the rounds

Jak II: Renegade [PS2]

Although darker and lacking the originality of *Jak And Daxter*, there's still plenty to enjoy in Naughty Dog's sequel. In fact, some would say that if it were guilty of anything, it's simply trying too hard.

Prince Of Persia: The Sands Of Time [Multi]

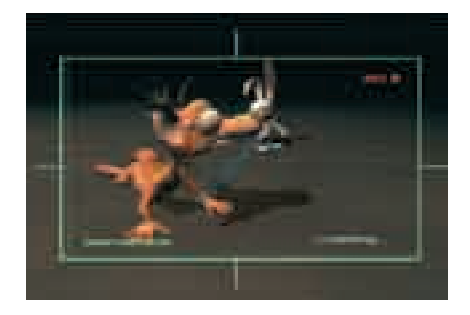
It might not have been the financial success that Ubisoft was hoping for, but you can't deny this is one sweet platformer. Forget Microsoft's *Blinx*, this shows you how to manage time properly.

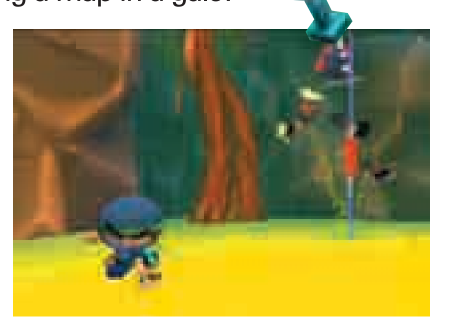
Super Mario Advance 4: Super Mario Bros 3 [GBA]

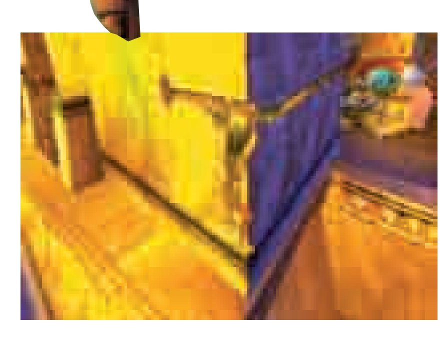
You can't talk about platformers without mentioning the Game Boy Advance. This title might have started off on the NES, but Nintendo's classic is perfectly suited to its new hardware.

CONTROLS

Smooth and responsive or like folding a map in a gale?







Whiplash

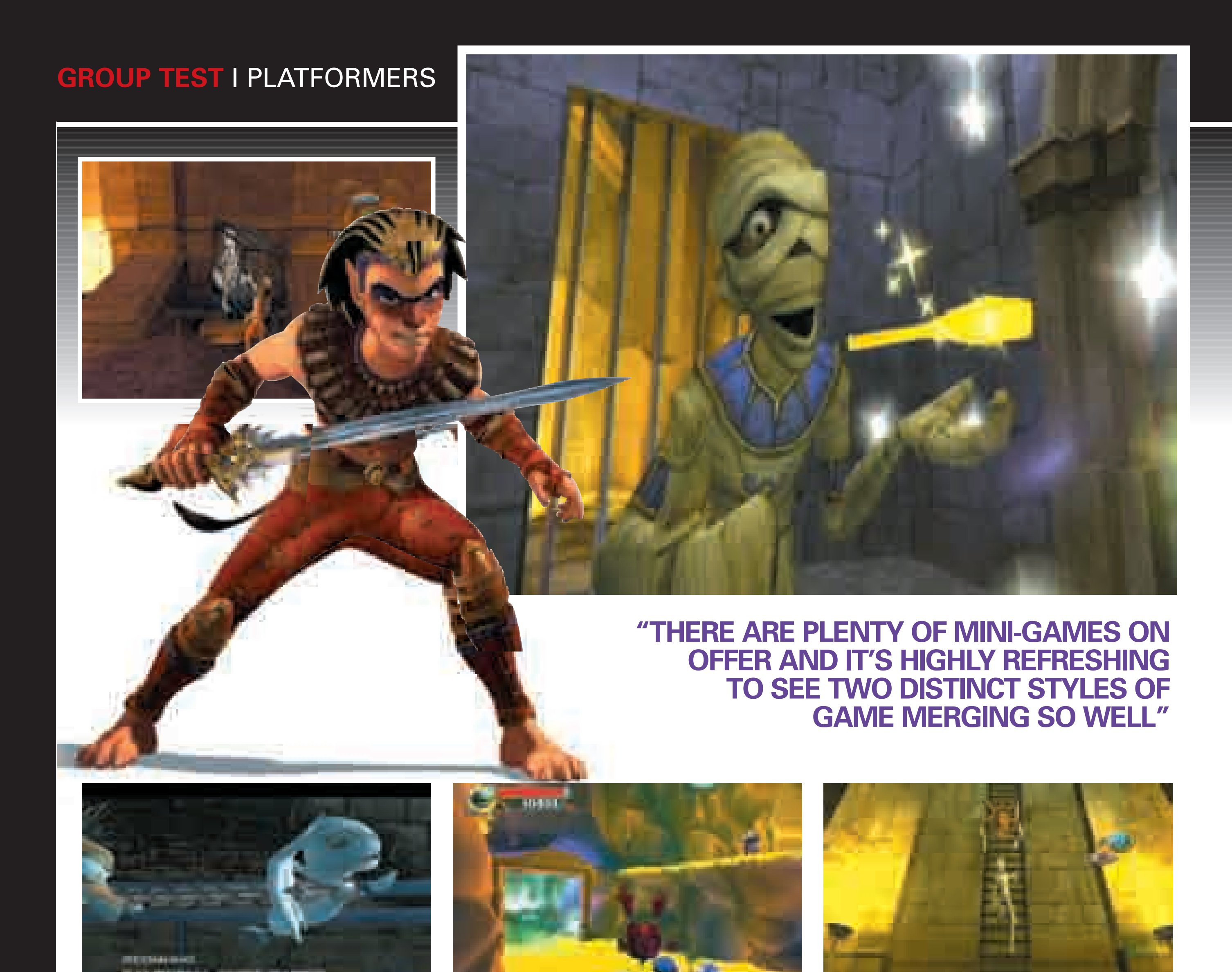
Competent is perhaps the best word to describe Crystal Dynamics' romp. Control throughout is reasonable (if not outstanding) and you'll rarely find yourself cursing at the screen, although the erratic camera might not always let you see what's going on. Considering the vast array of moves available to them, Spanx and Redmond always respond quickly to your controls, and you never feel cheated after failing a particularly tricky jump or succumbing to an especially vicious guard; you'll always level the blame squarely on yourself and promise that you'll pass it on your next attempt. Despite all this, *Whiplash* is nothing out of the ordinary and does the job at hand with the minimum of fuss.

I-Ninja

As much as we want to hand this category to I-Ninja, he unfortunately suffers from a few issues in the control department. While Argonaut should be praised for keeping *I-Ninja*'s diverse controls as simple as possible, the downside to this is that they're not always as responsive as we'd have liked. A typical example can be found with the many walls you have to run along. Unlike, say, *Prince Of Persia* that requires you to press a separate button, *I-Ninja* relies on you taking a jump at the correct angle and getting it right first time. As is to be expected, this method is far from perfect and results in several frustrated shouts of anger (especially in the many timed levels of the game).

Sphinx

The controls in *Sphinx* depend largely on which character you're using. Sphinx is athletic and can perform numerous tasks with ease. He's also handy with a sword and – despite an occasionally free-roaming camera – connects solidly with whatever he hits. The stealth-based Mummy, on the other hand, feels twitchier and lacks Sphinx's combat abilities. That said, both characters suffer from rather stodgy controls, a fact most noticeable when they start leaping around. With so many 'floaty' jumps and a mass of sections that require pixel-perfect timing, you'll soon find yourself wishing for the straightforward controls of *Whiplash* and the flowing (though sometimes unforgiving) movement of *I-Ninja*.



"THERE ARE PLENTY OF MINI-GAMES ON OFFER AND IT'S HIGHLY REFRESHING TO SEE TWO DISTINCT STYLES OF GAME MERGING SO WELL"

GAMEPLAY Will this one run and run and…?

Whiplash

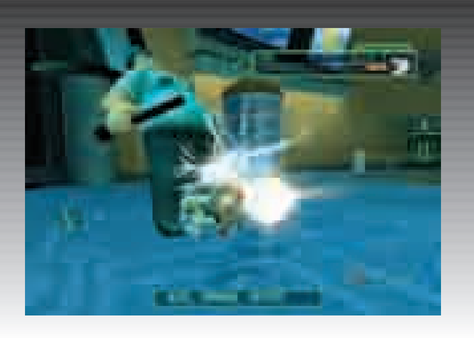
While *Whiplash* has quite a bit going for it, it is pure platforming by numbers. Wreaking havoc with a rabbit may be hilariously funny to begin with, but this can only mask the shallow and predictable gameplay for so long. Of course, it's great how every object in the game is destructible, but let's face it, there's only so much enjoyment you can glean from repeating the same mundane tasks over and over again. Throughout your journey, you'll constantly find your way blocked by bizarre and dangerous machinery, but it's often just a case of mashing the action button for all you're worth until said object is eventually demolished – the fact that you're destroying something by jamming a rabbit into it is only entertaining for so long. Rinse, lather and repeat and you have the crux of *Whiplash*'s core gameplay.

I-Ninja

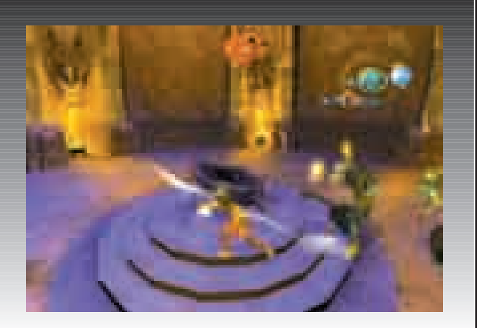
When it comes to variety, *I-Ninja* is well ahead of the competition. It's also most guilty of resembling other games, but when there's this much diversity you can't really complain. While there are the traditional 'jump around' sections in *I-Ninja*, you also get the opportunity to negotiate eyeballs through some precarious and well-thought-out mazes (just like *Super Monkey Ball*); climb into a giant robot to pummel an opponent robot senseless; and stop a beach invasion by destroying every boat that tries to land. If that isn't enough for you, how does flying through the air while battling giant ninjas, or guiding a missile through some particularly hazardous trenches sound? What's more, in many cases, *I-Ninja* actually does it better than the game it's emulating (not bad considering each of these small elements are merely a part of the main game).

Sphinx

Although Sphinx and his Mummy sidekick may not share the diversity of I-Ninja, there's still plenty on offer here to keep you busy. Most of the exotic locations sprawl out tantalisingly before you and it really does pay to fully explore your surroundings and discover the game's many hidden secrets. There are plenty of mini-games to enjoy and it's highly refreshing to see two distinct styles of game merging so well – the puzzling elements help to break up the rather generic *Zelda*-esque exploring. Another nice feature is the way that certain monsters can be collected (*Kameo*-style) and then used to solve various problems or reveal previously blocked paths. There's generally a lot more gameplay hours to be found in *Sphinx* and you'll continue to play it long after you've reached the end of *I-Ninja* and *Whiplash*.







FINAL VERDICT More or less than the sum of their parts?

Whiplash

We're always pleased to see originality, and the pairing of Spanx and Redmond is inspired. Levels may not boast a cohesive structure, but they're enjoyable and bursting with energy. Although *Whiplash* is funny, its appeal is limited. Gamers will revel in the destruction that unfolds as they guide Spanx and Redmond through the Genron labs, but you soon realise that the humorous touches are hiding a basic and rather childish title. Indeed, *Whiplash*'s gameplay is at odds with its adult humour and you'll find yourself wishing that Crystal Dynamics had pushed the envelope a little further.

VERDICT 5/10
FUNNY ENOUGH, BUT ULTIMATELY SHALLOW

I-Ninja

While *I-Ninja* has borrowed ideas from practically every classic platformer, it's been done with such wide-eyed innocence that you can't help smiling. In fact, this title upstages the likes of *Super Monkey Ball* and *Rayman* – the camera, for example, seems better placed than in SEGA's simian caper. Of course, *I-Ninja* is far from perfect – the controls are hit-and-miss and certain stages are very frustrating – but a slew of neat touches (like earning coloured belts to open levels) ensures that this is great fun. Let's hope it doesn't remain PS2-exclusive as it would be a shame for Xbox and Cube owners to miss out.

VERDICT 7/10
FULL OF VARIETY BUT LET DOWN BY IFFY CONTROLS

Sphinx

There's plenty to enjoy about *Sphinx And The Cursed Mummy*. Eurocom has created an interesting pair of characters, with special mention going to the amusing Mummy. While Sphinx's adventures are rather average and play very similarly to *Starfox Adventures* and the *Zelda* games, the Mummy levels are a different matter – stealth and laughs abound in equal measures and there are some extremely clever puzzles that fully exploit the Mummy's undead status. *Sphinx* misses out on first place because it's simply not as fun to play as Argonaut's title, but it's still well worth a look.

VERDICT 6/10
A CLEVER BLEND OF TWO DISTINCT GAME STYLES

WINNER "THERE CAN BE ONLY ONE"

I-Ninja

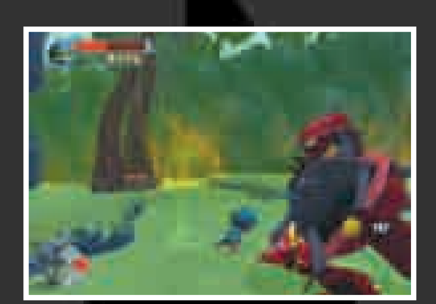
It's been a tough slog, but we can safely say that *I-Ninja* is by far and away one of the most enjoyable platformers we've played in ages. It's by no means original, but the sheer amount of variety on offer is staggering. And besides, how many games begin with you killing the person you're supposed to be rescuing?

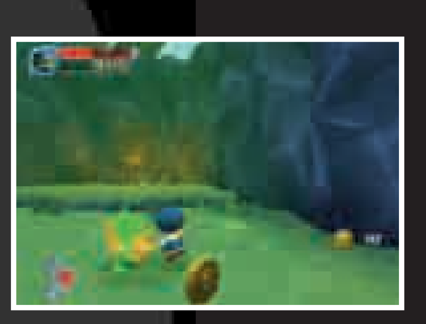
I-Ninja's humour may not be as sharp as that in *Whiplash*, but seeing your little Ninja precariously balancing on top of a recently climbed wall, or using his sword as a helicopter, is still enough to bring a smile to your face. While *I-Ninja* uses a traditional hub method, it's fairly well designed and there's very little back-tracking, unless, of course, you want to return to an existing level.

Considering how well the levels are designed, there's every chance that you may want to revisit them and it's nice to see that even this hasn't been wasted. Returning to a level will present you with a tight time limit; although seemingly impossible at first, perseverance pays off and you'll soon be clocking previously tough levels with ease.

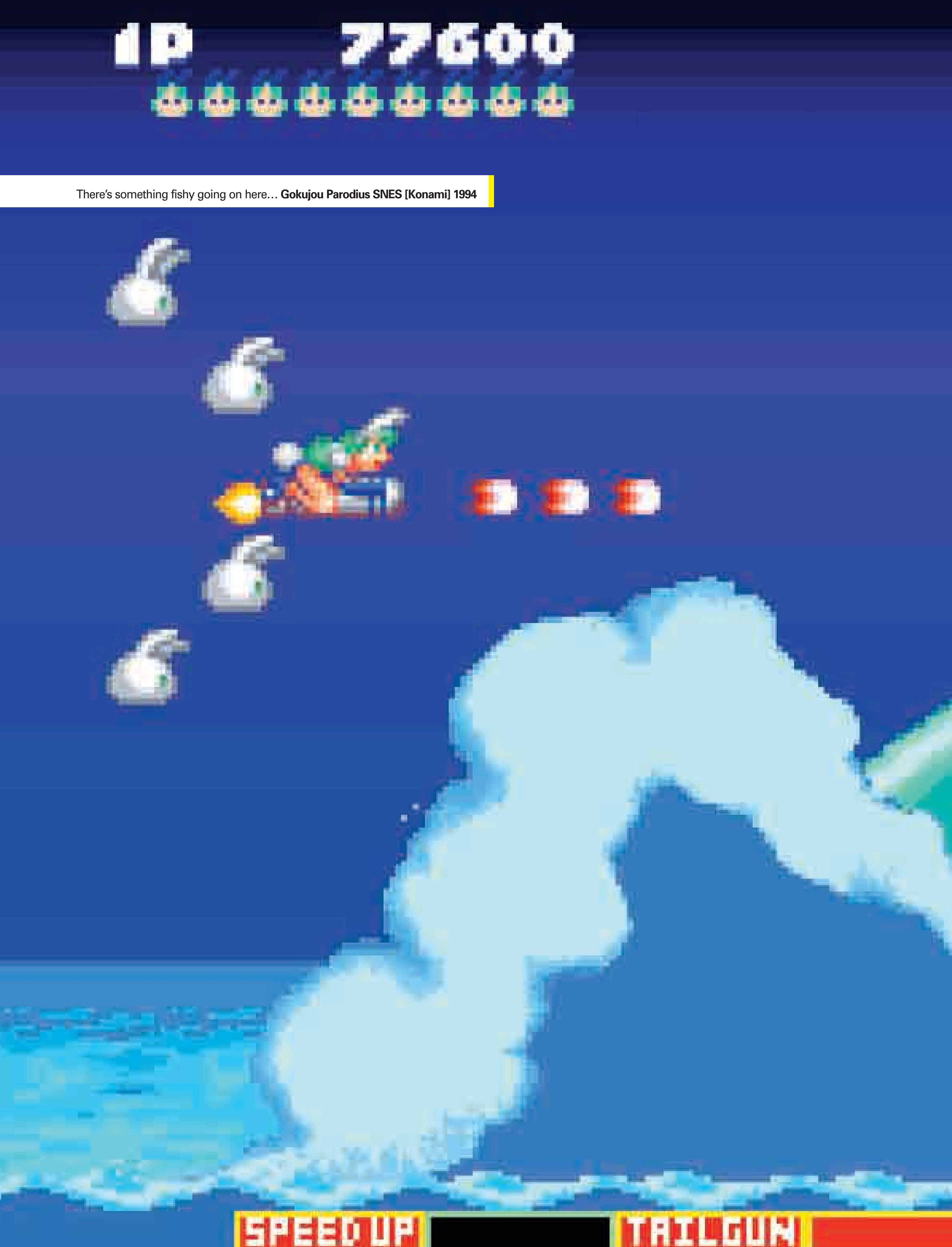
Of course, *I-Ninja* is not without its problems – curse those often-erratic controls – yet you're highly unlikely to find anything else around right now that can beat it for sheer enjoyment. For all its Japanese influences – you've got to love those giant battling robots – it remains rooted in Western sensibilities. We're also rather pleased to see Argonaut on a potential winning streak again. Ignore the cutesy, *Bomber Man*-style main character and the sparse, brightly coloured visuals; *I-Ninja* is definitely worth your time and money.







"CONSIDERING HOW WELL THE LEVELS ARE DESIGNED, THERE'S EVERY CHANCE THAT YOU'LL WANT TO REVISIT THEM"



There's something fishy going on here… **Gokujou Parodius SNES [Konami] 1994**



HI 77600
SHOOT!
OH!
SHIELD


eMag


A PARAGON PUBLICATION
NO.16 MARCH 2004
RETRO
00p
MICRO GAMES ACTION
FORGOTTEN WORLDS
Would the remake still cut it? Find out inside!
NEO GEO POCKET COLOR
WHY DID NO-ONE BUY THIS FINE MACHINE?
UNIVERSAL SOLDIER & TURRICAN 2
FIND OUT WHY THESE TWO GAMES ARE MORE CLOSELY RELATED THAN YOU MIGHT THINK!
PLUS CLASSIC ADS FROM YESTERYEAR!
QUACKSHOT
THE GREATEST RETRO GAME EVER!
OUTRUN 2019 - WHAT WENT WRONG?
WHAT WERE YOU PLAYING IN 1992?
CLASSIC GAME SYSTEM BUYERS' GUIDE

Retro News

Find out what's going on in the here and now of retro gaming…

After trying Namco's *R: Racing Evolution*, we were compelled to go back and have a go on *Ridge Racer 5* as well as other PS2 launch games. We discovered that many of those early titles still look better than a lot of today's offerings, though the overall experience now feels somehow out of date. In fact, the likes of *Tekken Tag* and *Street Fighter EX3* don't feel as fresh as 2D alternatives like *Super Street Fighter II Turbo*, despite being newer.

Perhaps, we need to treat 2D and 3D games as completely separate entities. After all, it took roughly 20 years for 2D gaming to mature, while 3D games are still, relatively speaking, in their infancy. What's more, there are, theoretically, more avenues to be explored in three dimensions, so it's highly likely that it'll take even longer for polygonal games to fully blossom.

By all accounts, then, we won't see the true beauty of what polygons have to offer until at least 2014, by which time more advanced methods of producing imagery are likely to be just around the corner.

Keith Edwards, Retro Editor

Model 3 For PC

SEGA's powerful Model 3 arcade board has been cracked at last

Hardcore SEGA fans will be pleased to hear that after years of trying, coders have finally been able to emulate the company's powerful Model 3 arcade board. Despite being in its early stages, a handful of games are already up and running, though at the time of writing some of the imagery is a little coarse.

For example, *SCUD Race* (which was never ported to home consoles, much to the disappointment of SEGA's die-hard fans) is lacking many of the original game's special effects, including texture filtering and specula effects. Even so, the fact that it's working at all is something to be celebrated. Of course, Model 3 was behind many other great SEGA games aside from *SCUD Race*, and titles such as *SEGA Rally 2* and *The Lost World* are already much closer to their arcade counterparts (though *The Lost World* doesn't work quite so well with a mouse, admittedly).

We're keeping our fingers crossed that further refinements will be made, though it's likely to be some time before the results are perfect, especially seeing as perfect emulation of SEGA's older Model 2 board still hasn't been achieved. It may be a few years before the likes of *SCUD Race*, *Le Mans 24*, *Ocean Hunter* and *Harley Davidson: L.A. Riders* are up and running in our homes.



▲ Although some of the effects have yet to be emulated properly, Model 3 is up and running on PC.

Pocket Famicom For Japan

Nintendo launches a new piece of hardware that every fan will want

Following the hype generated by Nintendo's super-rare Famicom-style Game Boy Advance last year, a simplified revision of the hardware has now gone on sale in Japan, along with a selection of retro games. Unfortunately, a little of the loveliness has been lost with this new mass-produced version of the system; the gold fascia has been replaced with white plastic, and instead of having maroon borders around each button, the buttons themselves are maroon, giving the overall look a little less class than it had before. That said, the Game Boy Advance SP Famicom Color is still a very sexy piece of kit that Nintendoids will no doubt cherish. Famicom Colors can be bought online for around £100.

Famicom Mini Games

Although the Famicom Color has only just launched in Japan, a good selection of games are already available from Nintendo, Namco, and Hudson, priced at ¥2,000 (£10). Among the titles on offer are *Super Mario Bros*, *Ice Climber*, *Donkey Kong*, *Excite Bike*, *Legend Of Zelda*, *Pac-Man*, *Xevious*, *Bomberman* and *Star Soldier*. Should keep you busy…



This Month In 1992

We were all bored of Shakespear's Sister in March 1992 – they'd been at number one for about four years, after all. But SEGA Of America had bigger things to worry about…

UK Charts in March 1992



1. Stay
Shakespear's Sister

2. I Love Your Smile
Shanice

3. My Girl
The Temptations

4. America: What Time Is Love?
The KLF

5. Weather With You
Crowded House

6. It's A Fine Day
Opus III

7. November Rain
Guns N' Roses

8. Tears In Heaven
Eric Clapton

9. Finally
Ce Ce Peniston

10. To Be With You
Mr. Big

Top movies in America, 1992

1. Aladdin
($217,350,219)

2. Home Alone Lost In New York
($173,585,516)

3. Batman Returns
($217,350,219)

4. Lethal Weapon 3
($144,731,527)

5. A Few Good Men
($141,340,178)

6. Sister Act
($139,610,000)

7. The Bodyguard
($121,945,729)

8. Wayne's World
($121,697,350)

9. Patriot Games
($83, 287,363)

10. The Last Of The Mohicans
($72,455,275)

GAMING NEWS MARCH '92

SEGA Prepares An Assault. Or Is That Insult?



Although the Genesis had been moderately popular in America, sales had slowed since the launch of the SNES in September 1991. So SEGA thought that a CD-ROM add-on might be what gamers were looking for.

The Mega CD had gone on sale in Japan in December 1991 at ¥49,800 (£260), and despite the high price it had been fairly well received. SEGA Of Japan thought decent marketing and a lower price in the US would bring American gamers back to the fold.

SEGA Of America had the difficult task of convincing the industry that the SEGA CD (as it was renamed in the States) was more than the white elephant we now know it to be. The first the company knew about the machine's Western release was SEGA Of Japan's surprise unveiling at the Consumer Electronics Show in March 1992. It was finally launched in October for $299 (£165).

Meanwhile, UK gamers were awaiting the arrival of the SNES. The machine had been confirmed for an April release, and stores were already taking pre-orders. *Mario World* was by far the most popular of the first batch of titles, which included classics such as *F-Zero* and *Super Tennis*.

I·N T·H·E N·E·W·S

A ROYAL PARTING FOR FERGIE AND ANDREW

It was in March 1992 that Buckingham Palace officially announced the separation of the Duke and Duchess of York. The couple were rumoured to be going through 'marital difficulties' for some time, so the news wasn't a great surprise. What was unusual, however, was that in the Palace's statement the Queen openly admitted her sadness over the matter and asked the media not to intrude on her family's privacy during this difficult time.

The Duke and Duchess had been married since 1986 and had two children, Princesses Beatrice and Eugenie. Although the couple announced their separation in 1992, they weren't divorced until May 1996. They have remained on friendly terms, and Fergie has since made a name for herself in America promoting Weight Watchers.



▲ Going back to stay at his mum's place wasn't such a hardship for Prince Andrew after the divorce…

Great RETRO Gaming Moments

CONKER'S BAD FUR DAY

Format: **Nintendo 64**
Publisher: **THQ**
Developer: **Rare**
Release Date: **2001**

We blame *South Park*. The crudely animated and just plain crude cartoon introduced a whole new level of potty-mouthed humour to the world. With frequent gags (and occasional gagging) concerning a wide range of bodily functions and messy deaths, the show struck a chord with scatologically minded viewers everywhere. Hell, it even featured a talking poo called Mr Hankey. So it was perhaps inevitable that game developers would try to tap into the popular formula.

In 2001, Rare did just that with the release of *Conker's Bad Fur Day*, a formerly cutesy platform adventure that had been re-dressed with mature humour and plenty of bad language. With scenes inspired by *Saving Private Ryan* and *The Matrix*, *Conker* wasn't without its standout moments, though there was one section that gamers tend to remember above all the others – The Great Mighty Poo.

Coming from the same cack-encrusted school of acting as Mr Hankey, the Mighty Poo was a living, breathing pile of poo that lurked in a hollowed-out mountain of faeces. Poo had only his indigestible sweetcorn buddies to keep him company and, as you'd expect, he wasn't a happy bunny. Far from it, in fact: all this nasty piece of work wanted to do was be foul (smelling and acting) to any unsuspecting squirrels that happened upon him.

Amusingly, the entire scene (which involves you throwing toilet rolls into Poo's mouth until he's defeated) revolved around an operatic song sung by the scat-man himself. Thanks to Poo's booming voice and some of the most abrasive lyrics this side of Misteeq, this vile character's cameo is one great retro gaming moment that won't be forgotten in a long time.





▲ The Great Mighty Poo was in demand as an after-dinner speaker and delighted the ladies with his repartee.

SING WITH POO

**I am The Great Mighty Poo,
And I'm going to throw my XXXXX at you,
A huge amount of XXXXX comes from my chocolate starfish,
How about some XXXXX you little XXXXX?**

**Do you really think you'll survive in here?
You don't seem to know which creek you're in!
Sweetcorn is the only thing that makes it through my rear,
How d'you think I keep this lovely grin?**

**Now I'm really getting rather mad,
You're like a niggly, tickly, XXXXX little tagnut.
When I've knocked you out with all my blab,
I'm going to take your head and ram it up my butt!**

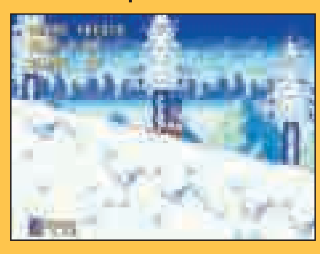


This Month's Favourites

Just a few of the classic retro titles that have been blistering our thumbs this month…

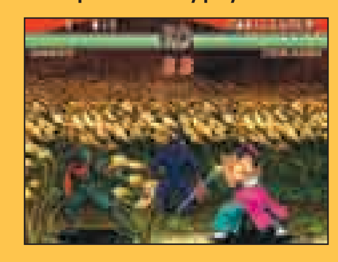
SONIC THE HEDGEHOG 3

Despite not being as good as the first two games, *Sonic 3* still has a lot going for it. And the soundtrack sounds like Sophie Ellis Bextor.



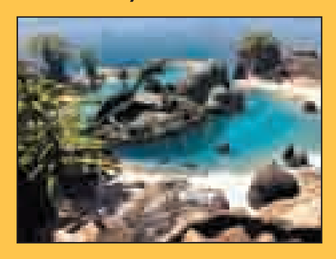
SAMURAI SHODOWN 2

For many, this was the highpoint of the *Samurai Shodown* series. Although we prefer the original, the sequel is still very playable.



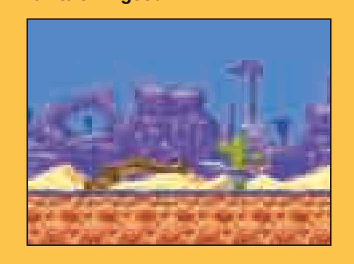
RIVEN

Perhaps not as renowned as *Myst*, the follow-up was undoubtedly a better-crafted game. In fact, it's better than *Myst 3: Exile* too



ROAD RUNNER: DVR

Death Valley Rally managed to capture the look of the cartoons really well. Sadly, it was just too fast for its own good.



Why Don't They Remake...

BIG MEN WITH BIG GUNS. YOU CAN TELL THIS WAS MADE IN THE EIGHTIES

FORGOTTEN WORLDS

Format: **Arcade**
Publisher: **Capcom**
Developer: **Capcom**
Release Date: **1988**

Although it doesn't always come up with the goods nowadays, Capcom was synonymous with excellent arcade games in the late Eighties and early Nineties. While certain titles (*Street Fighter II* and *Final Fight*, for example) fared better than others and quickly rose to dominance in arcades, other titles gained more of a cult following despite being just as good as Capcom's higher-profile games.

For many potential punters, *Forgotten Worlds*' awkward-looking control system was more than enough to make them take their credits elsewhere in search of a quick blast. Although your character was moved through the scrolling levels via a joystick, his gun was controlled by a dial; while this made for some extremely detailed shooting, it proved to be rather confusing for less hardened gamers. Add to this the fact that huge numbers of enemies (and their bullets) quickly overran you and it was easy to see why *Forgotten Worlds* normally appealed to only the most hardcore arcade players.

This was a real shame, because there was plenty about this game to enjoy. Though the many enemies were rather small, they were all extremely detailed and displayed plenty of imagination and variety (this was especially apparent when you met the impressive bosses). Destroyed enemies would leave behind blue coins (called Zenney) that could be used to buy weapons and equipment from each level's shop.



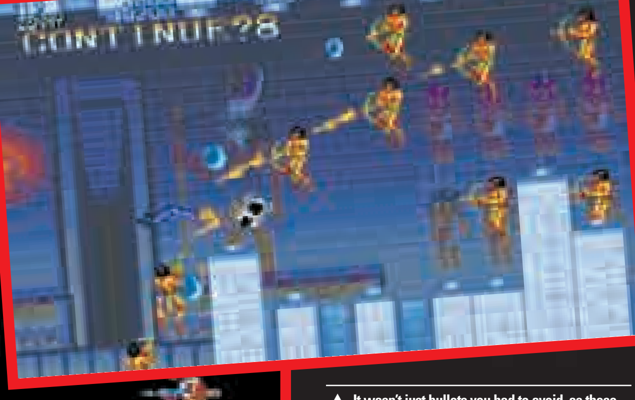
▲ Once you'd got the hang of the dial-controlled weaponry a whole world of blasting action was yours to enjoy.

To many, though, *Forgotten Worlds* was all about the bosses. Indeed, they provided some of the game's highlights – they were all extremely tough to beat and bloody huge to boot. Many of them comfortably filled the entire screen and would take endless volleys before they'd finally succumb to your firepower. Special mention, however, has to go to the giant blue god on Level 3.

After battling your way through some extremely tough opponents, you'd eventually come across a priest involved in summoning the aforementioned god. As the screen started to scroll upwards, you were immediately overcome by the sheer size of the creature.

Deftly dodging the lasers that shot from his eyes, you were soon filling his face with as much plasma as you could muster. Just when you thought you'd got the upper hand, however, the god's huge fists pummelled you from either side of the screen. Top stuff.

Forgotten Worlds had everything you'd expect from a quality shoot-'em-up; the levels were varied, there were some suitably meaty weapons to buy and the bosses were hard as nails. A quality shooter and no mistake.



▲ It wasn't just bullets you had to avoid, as these ancient Egyptian archers tried to fill you with arrows. Luckily, being from the future and everything, you had a gun. So you win.

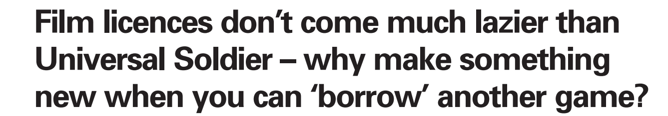
◀ Enemies came from all directions, demanding some quick reactions and trigger-finger work. This was definitely a title for the more hardcore arcade gamers…

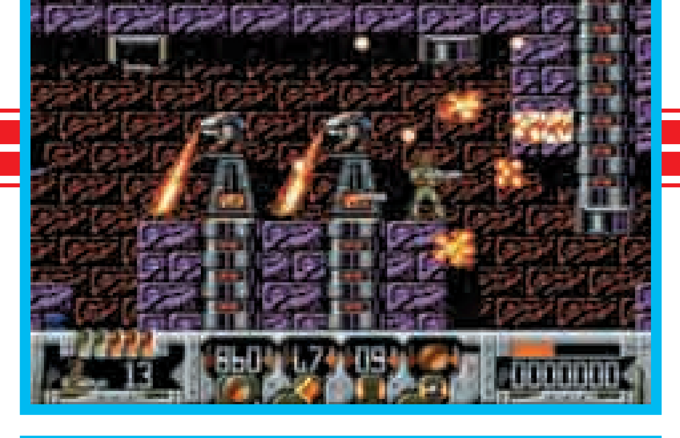
MEGA DRIVE MAGIC

Despite the tricky control set-up, *Forgotten Worlds* worked extremely well on the Mega Drive and was a very faithful conversion. Because the Mega Drive pad lacked a dial, your gun was controlled by holding down the B button and using A and C to rotate your weapon either left or right. Graphics throughout were of a very high standard and even the bosses were extremely well realised. Despite being in competition with plenty of other shooters on SEGA's machine, *Forgotten Worlds* capably held its own.



Haven't We Met Before?







Film licences don't come much lazier than Universal Soldier – why make something new when you can 'borrow' another game?

In today's market it's fairly easy to spot games that borrow ideas from successful predecessors, but finding one that blatantly rips out entire sections of a game and then reproduces them as its own is virtually impossible. Go back to 1992, though, and you'll find one such example of this in the form of Accolade's *Universal Soldier* on the Mega Drive and SNES – a hastily thrown-together rehash of *Turrican 2* (one of the Amiga's finest platform-based shoot-'em-ups) designed to cash in on yet another Van Damme movie. And it's rubbish.

Right from the get-go, it's obvious to anyone who's played *Turrican 2* that *Universal Soldier* steals some of its vital elements. From the weapons, power-ups and enemies to the fact that the lead character can morph into a big spiky wheel and roll around the landscape (remember that from the film? No, neither can we), only the opening forest background and the redrawn sprite representing Van Damme show anything even remotely new.

Get past the first stage and things get worse, mainly because Level 2 is a complete duplication of *Turrican 2*'s first stage – albeit with worse colouring and graphical effects. Anyone willing to play deeper into the game will discover that virtually all of the later levels (bar about three of them, all of which are badly designed and stand out against the others like a sore thumb) are exact replicas of *Turrican 2*'s stages. It's almost like developer Ballistic couldn't be bothered to create anything new, instead putting all of its efforts into worsening what was already there.

But the question remains – why wasn't *Turrican 2* developer Factor 5 beating down Accolade's door, demanding compensation for such a blatant rip-off? One word: cash. Rather than allowing Factor 5 to create its own console version of the *Turrican* licence (something that the company was chomping at the bit to do), publisher Rainbow Arts sold the *Turrican* rights to Accolade for a fairly large sum, giving it the freedom to create any game it wanted with the engine. Add one film-licence and *Universal Soldier* was born… though we really wish it hadn't been.

YOU'RE NOT THE BOSS OF ME

Probably the most shambolic thing about *Universal Soldier* has to be the way it represents *Turrican 2*'s hulking boss characters, if only because it replaces them with laughably bad attempts to tie the game to the film just that bit more. Obviously, using a giant robotic warrior, a laser-powered spaceship or a metal-clad sentinel as a boss character wouldn't have fitted the style of the game (even though having radioactive spiders, pulsating blob creatures and exploding spiked cones for enemies did), so developer Ballistic decided to replace them with more suitable adversaries. Unfortunately, the replacements – in the form of a super-sized soldier, a squadron of helicopters and an armoured truck – not only looked rubbish, but they were stupidly easy to defeat as well. Disgraceful.



LOST IN TRANSLATION

We take a look at some of the silliest Japanese-to-English videogame translations

While many games that have been translated from Japanese to English tend to feature the odd spelling mistake or grammatical error here and there, SNK's titles seem to boast a larger number than the average release. Take *Samurai Shodown*, for example – every time you finish off a rival the word 'Victoly' is displayed proudly across the screen. SNK's translators hardly have anything to be celebrating with glaring errors like that. Looks like they deserve 'spacial' thanks for that one.



THE LAST BLADE (Arcade) SNK, 1997 – Original arcade flyer

Classic Machine

SPECIFICATIONS

CPU: Toshiba TLCS900H (16-bit)
CPU Speed: 6.144 MHz
MEMORY: ROM: 64Kb boot ROM
RAM: 128 Kbytes
RESOLUTION: 160 x 152
COLOUR PALETTE: 4,096
MAX COLOURS: 146
MAX NUMBER OF SPRITES: 64 per frame
MAX COLOURS PER SPRITE: 4
SOUND: PROCESSOR: Z80 (3.072 MHz)
FUNCTIONS: PSG six-tone simultaneous stereo output
POWER SUPPLY: 2 x AA batteries or AC adaptor
OTHER FUNCTIONS: World clock, calendar, horoscope and alarm (requires lithium battery)
COMMUNICATIONS: SIO 1 Channel 19200 bps, five-pin serial port



NEOGEO POCKET COLOR

WITH SNK'S STYLE LOOKING OUT-OF-DATE, THE COMPANY SHOULD HAVE INVESTED IN STAFF TRAINING. INSTEAD IT POURED ITS REMAINING FUNDS INTO A HANDHELD CONSOLE TO GO HEAD-TO-HEAD WITH NINTENDO'S GAME BOY…

Somehow, SNK obviously thought it had a chance against Nintendo's Game Boy when it released the Neo Geo Pocket Color. The company had entered the handheld market a few months previously with the monochrome Neo Geo Pocket, but Nintendo was already promoting its Game Boy Color. Unperturbed by the competition, however, SNK went back to the drawing board and re-launched its portable console with a colour screen on 18 March, 1999. It couldn't really compete effectively with the Game Boy and its huge back catalogue, but for SNK's loyal fans it was a dream come true.

The Neo Geo Pocket Color (NGPC) had a clear display, and its powerful graphics chips and 16-bit central processor meant Neo Geo titles could be ported across without losing too much gameplay. Games such as *Samurai Spirits* (*Samurai Shodown*) and *Fatal Fury*, for example, were redrawn with super-deformed characters to make them stand out on the small screen, while the likes of *Metal Slug* and *Puzzle Bobble* (*Bust-A-Move*) were simplified but remained in their original style. There were original titles too, such as *SNK Vs. Capcom: Match Of The Millennium* which featured a massive 26 fighters and some classic gameplay.

Of course, the selection of one-on-one beat-'em-ups and puzzle games was never going to appeal to everyone. Although SNK was desperately trying to expand by encouraging third-party developers to create games for the system, few were interested due to the relatively small user base. Even so, SEGA (which was still trying to promote the Dreamcast) collaborated with SNK to produce *Sonic The Hedgehog: Pocket Adventure*, which was Sonic's first 2D outing in four years and worked well on the portable system. But the NGPC needed more games and, aside from a handful of Japanese card battlers, new titles just didn't arrive fast enough.

The situation for the handheld was worse in America where the software catalogue wasn't bolstered by these card battlers or fruit-machine simulators. But even in Japan it didn't take long for the novelty to wear off. After seven

KET

months on sale the NGPC's price was cut from ¥8,000 (£45) to just ¥6,800 (£35). In the UK, shops were left with hundreds of unsold systems (despite the low £59.99 price) and most were returned to warehouses within weeks of the launch.

This poor reception was bad news for the already struggling SNK, and three years after the launch of the NGPC the company declared itself bankrupt. Perhaps because of its short-lived shelf life the classy handheld has amassed something of a cult following, with certain titles (most notably *Faselei*) becoming highly collectable.

"WHY I LOVE MY NEO GEO POCKET COLOR"

Although I've always loved *Tetris* and *Mario Land*, I never really enjoyed playing on the monochrome Game Boy; the screen was too dull and there were far too many awful games to wade through. The Neo Geo Pocket Color, on the other hand, offered everything I was looking for from a handheld console – a colour screen, conversions of SNK's brilliant fighting games, and more than 20 hours of gameplay from just two paltry AA batteries.

Keith Edwards

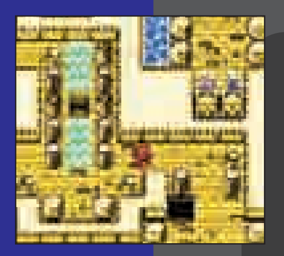
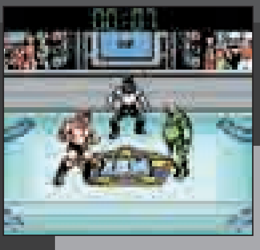
A DREAM COME TRUE

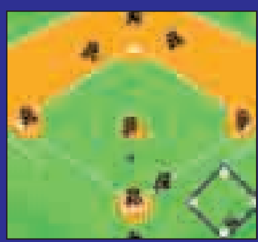
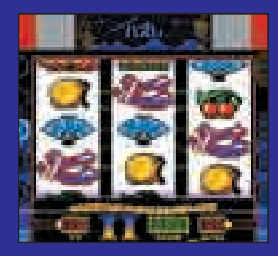
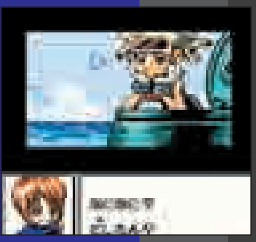
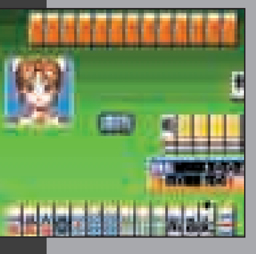
Although they were made by different manufacturers it was possible to link the Neo Geo Pocket Color and SEGA's Dreamcast together to unlock bonus features. With *The King Of Fighters R2*, for example, players could build up their character's stats on the portable game, then upload them to the Dreamcast and continue playing on *The King Of Fighters '99*. Predictably, there were only a few Japanese gamers who owned both systems and took advantage of the function, so neither company really benefited from the system.

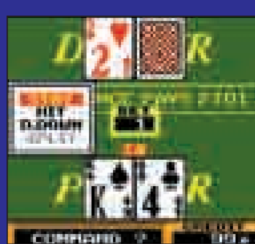


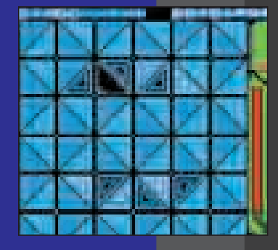
Classic Machine



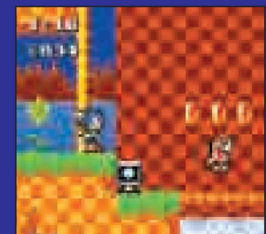
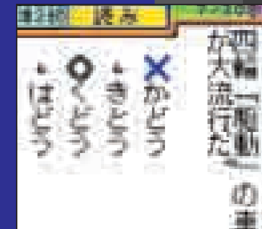
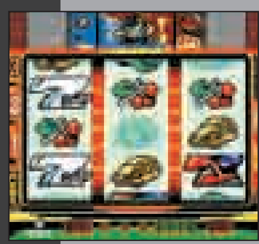



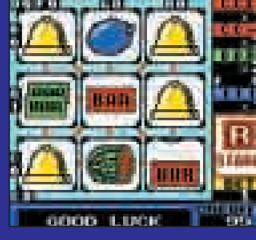





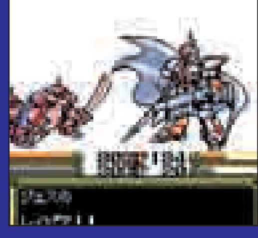
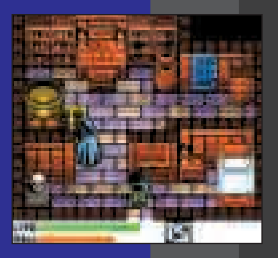
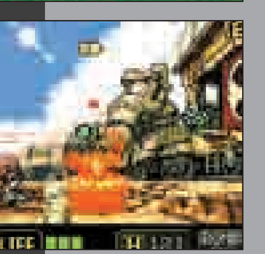


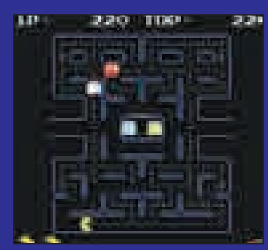



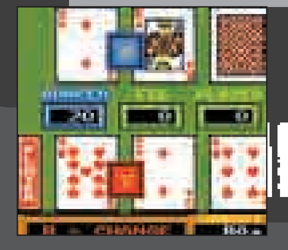
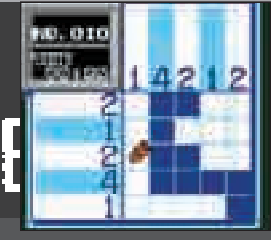


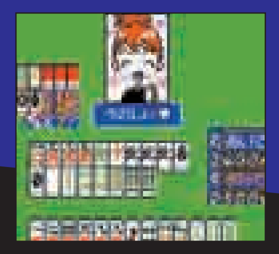
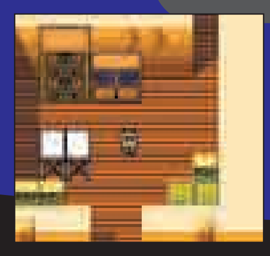
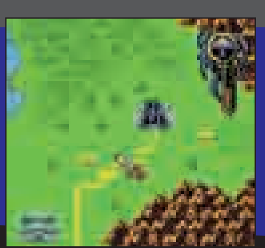
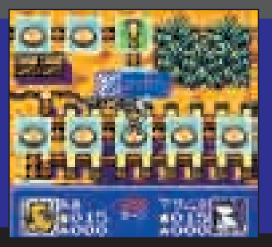








NEOGEO POCKET







The Neo Geo Pocket Color didn't sell well but boasted some quality titles…

Samurai Spirits 2

Publisher: SNK **Year:** 1999

Like so many of SNK's NGPC games, *Samurai Spirits 2* (which was merely a colour version of the monochrome game) featured super-deformed characters that were easy to see. While the conversion didn't include all the fighters from the Neo Geo arcade and AES versions, those that made it had a surprisingly large catalogue of special moves that worked well with just two buttons and a control stick.



SVC: Match Of The Millennium

Publisher: SNK **Year:** 1999

SNK Vs. Capcom: Match Of The Millennium was at the top of its genre back in 1999. Featuring a massive line-up of 26 characters, the game included almost all the favourites complete with nearly all their moves. You could even link it up to *Capcom Vs SNK* on the Dreamcast to unlock additional materials, though the leads to do so were only available in Japan.

Metal Slug: 1st Mission

Publisher: SNK **Year:** 1999

Along with *King Of Fighters*, *Samurai Shodown* and *Fatal Fury*, *Metal Slug* is one of SNK's most popular series – and one that converted surprisingly well to the NGPC. Despite its gory visuals and war theme, the original arcade game featured semi-cutesy characters, stunning animation and huge explosions. Much of the peripheral detail was cut out of the pocket version, though the overall look and gameplay were the same.



Pocket Tennis Color

Publisher: SNK **Year:** 1999

Pocket Tennis Color was extremely easy to pick up and play, and it lasted for hours. There were two modes – Exhibition and Tournament – with the latter giving you the chance to earn four additional characters, each with their own abilities. What's more, as the NGPC had a built-in clock, the game cleverly rewarded you with cups resembling different star signs depending on what time of the year you were playing.



Sonic: Pocket Adventure

Publisher: SNK
Year: 1999

Before SEGA officially went multiformat, it signed a deal with SNK to bring *Sonic The Hedgehog: Pocket Adventure* to the NGPC. It was the first 2D *Sonic* game to launch since *Chaotix* on the 32X four years previously, and while it didn't offer anything new or unique it was certainly a competent little title. In terms of style, the game was more like *Sonic 2* than any of the other games in the series and it still stands up well against the GBA and N-Gage versions.

Bust-A-Move Pocket

Publisher: SNK
Year: 1999

Although *Bust-A-Move* has appeared on just about every format, the NGPC version arrived before the GBA was available, and so was the best portable *Bust-A-Move* at that time. The screen was just big enough to do the game justice, though the pastel display meant that some colours were hard to distinguish. But that didn't spoil an otherwise enjoyable game.





GODS (Amiga/Atari ST/PC) Bitmap Brothers, 1991 – UK advertisement

© CRAP DRAWINGS INC.

Q·U·A·C·K·S·H·O·T

S·T·A·R·R·I·N·G D·O·N·A·L·D D·U·C·K

Greatest RETRO Game Ever

Who gets stuck with all the bad luck? No-one but Donald Duck

Format: **Mega Drive**
Publisher: **SEGA**
Developer: **Walt Disney Co.**
Release Date: **1991**



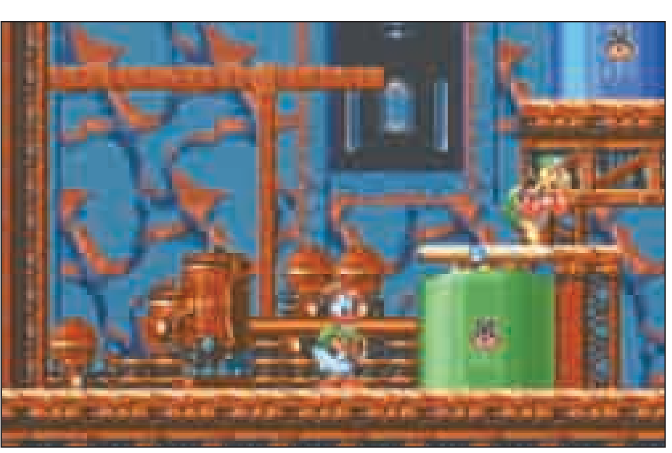
Back in the early Nineties SEGA had a solid relationship with Disney; 1990's *Castle Of Illusion Starring Mickey Mouse* had proved popular with gamers and Disney fans alike, and it was clear that SEGA had the ability to produce games every bit as charming as the classic cartoons themselves. So it wasn't surprising that the team of programmers and designers behind *Castle Of Illusion* next went to work on a similar platform title starring Disney's second star, Donald Duck.

DUCK TALES

Launching in Japan in December 1991, *Quackshot* took many of the elements that had worked well in *Castle Of Illusion* and added an Indiana Jones twist that saw Donald and his nephews travelling around the world in search of treasure. What was particularly impressive was how each location had been stylised to look like a Walt Disney cartoon, while simultaneously being faithful to the actual place. Countries such as Egypt and Transylvania were included, while India stood out for its sheer elegance and beauty, right down to the sitar soundtrack.

Of course, it was all very well having these grand locations to explore, but without decent gameplay they'd have been rather pointless. Thankfully, *Quackshot* had a number of unique gameplay features, most notably the various uses of Plungers. Initially armed with yellow ones, Donald could momentarily paralyse his enemies by sticking Plungers to them, allowing him to pass by without getting hit.

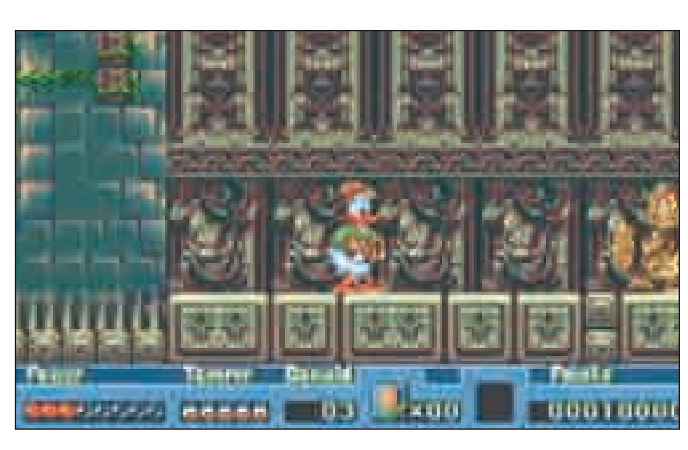
A little further into the game you'd meet Goofy who would award you some red Plungers, along with a cryptic clue to aid you through a later part of the game. Like the yellow Plungers, reds could be used to neutralise enemies, but also to scale walls; by firing Plungers at vertical pieces of scenery, a temporary platform was created. But it was the third type of Plunger that had the most uses; green ones allowed you to do all the things you could with reds, but also gave you the ability to cross wide chasms by sticking them to the undercarriages of birds that were flying past.



▲ The gameplay here was standard platform fare, but it was addictive and beautifully presented.



▲ The wide range of locations included jungles, deserts, the South Pole and even a Viking ship.



Plungers aside, Donald had access to two other types of ammunition – Bubblegum and Popcorn. While not as integral to the game as the Plungers, both of these had their uses, not least in Transylvania where Bubblegum could be used to disintegrate cursed walls that blocked the way. The Popcorn had no set use, though tricky enemies could be destroyed with a single blast rather than merely being frozen with a Plunger. Unfortunately, the lack of buttons on SEGA's standard Mega Drive pad meant the action had to be paused each time Donald needed to switch between the three weapons.

DUCK SOUP

Critics could argue that, aside from the gimmicky use of Plungers, *Quackshot* was nothing more than a run-of-the-mill platformer – and they'd be right too, if it wasn't for the fact that SEGA had designed the structure of the game with such mastery. Although there were tasks that had to be completed in order to move on, the order in which you tackled much of the game was completely up to you. Using the treasure map to mark your destination you could fly to Egypt, for example, and make your way across the burning sands only to find that you needed a specific item to access the Pyramid (the Sphinx's Tear in this instance). Of course, the item you needed was always somewhere else in the world and required the completion of some other task to get it, in this case defeating the tiger in the Maharaja's Garden in India.

After playing through *Quackshot*, it's difficult not to worry about SEGA's future. Going from such perfectly delivered titles as this to some of today's offerings, you really have to ask what's going wrong. Have all the creative individuals upped and left, or have money constraints meant that time-consuming research and development has had to take a back seat in recent years? Either way, SEGA's recent problems don't in any way affect the quality of *Quackshot*, which remains one of the greatest retro games ever.



Presentation: Games don't get much more polished than this	92%
Graphics Is it a game or a cartoon? Beautiful – simply beautiful	95%
Sound Catchy tunes and quirky sound effects are in abundance here	90%
Lifespan You'll finish it in an evening but you'll want to play it over and over	84%
OVERALL	**91%**

MANY DAYS AROUND THE WORLD

DUCKBURG
Situated on the west coast of America, the fictional city of Duckburg has a lot in common with Sesame Street; it's a typical American city, just a bit more fluffy.

MEXICO
With its golden colour scheme and multiple scrolling layers, Mexico is home to exploding cacti and snapping lobsters, not to mention a tomb filled with living flames.

TRANSYLVANIA
Starting off in a creepy wood where stagnant water seeps through the mossy ground, Transylvania is also home to a haunted castle where you'll come face to face with Dracula.

INDIA
The majestic rooftops in India lead to the Maharaja's Palace where a tiger is loose in the garden. But which doors lead to the boss and which take you back to the beginning?

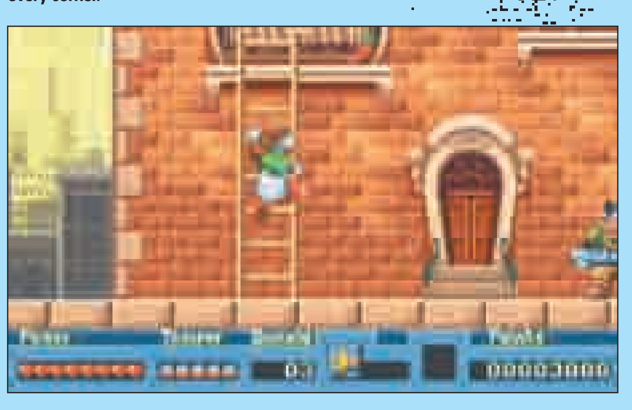
EGYPT
It's not all blue skies and warm sands for long – as soon as you get inside the Pyramid Egypt becomes a flaming nightmare where traps are set around every corner.

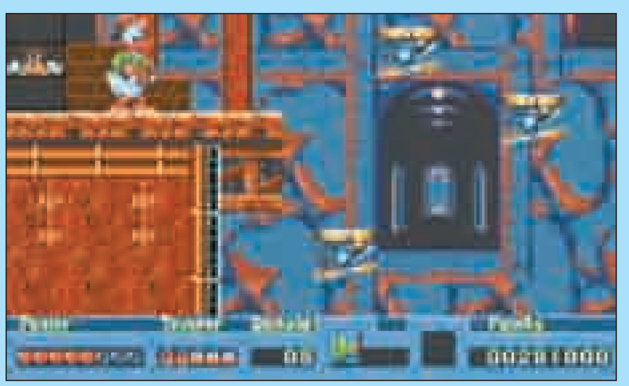
SOUTH POLE
With all those pastel colours and the Northern Lights twinkling in the skies above it's certainly very pretty at the South Pole. But watch out for evil penguins and killer whales.

VIKING SHIP
The moonlit sky and therapeutic music make the Viking Ship a relaxing change from much of the rest of the game. Though once you get below deck it's not so peaceful.

HIDEOUT
Things start to get quite a lot trickier once you get to Pete's Hideout – it's full of death-defying jumps. And don't think it's going to get any easier when you find Pete.

GREAT DUCK TREASURE ISLAND
Leafy and green, the snake-filled jungle leads to a temple where spears jut from the walls and statues are ready to attack. But that's nothing compared to the leap of faith that's to come…



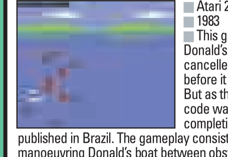


Donald Duck family tree

W*ith Quackshot being our game of the month, we take a look at the games that have featured the famously bad-tempered Donald Duck.*

His career in videogames goes as far back as 1983, even though his first outing never actually made it to the shelves. Still, he's not had a bad run of games considering he was 'born' in 1934 – we can't think of many 70-year-olds who are still active in the gaming community.
Of course, Donald's Disney colleagues have made their own games as well, but to list those too would take a whole magazine…

DONALD DUCK'S SPEEDBOAT



- Atari 2600
- 1983
- This game, Donald's first, was cancelled weeks before it was due out. But as the unfinished code was so near completion it was published in Brazil. The gameplay consisted of simply manoeuvring Donald's boat between obstacles.

DONALD DUCK'S PLAYGROUND



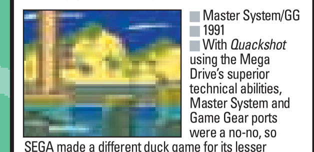
- Commodore 64
- 1984
- Created by Sierra and published by U.S. Gold, *Playground* was released on C64, and later on PC. The game won awards thanks to its maths-based educational content. You had to solve puzzles to earn money to buy toys for Huey, Dewey & Louie.

DONALD DUCK

- NES
- 1988
- Instead of being a platformer *Donald Duck* for the NES was an Olympics game with a twist. Rather than focusing on serious track and field events, this game featured the sack race, the boot toss and the pogo jump. Great fun, but now forgotten.

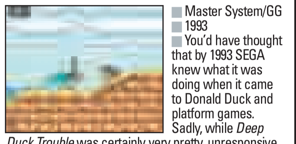
STRATEGIC PLUNGERS

THE LUCKY DIME CAPER



- Master System/GG
- 1991
- With *Quackshot* using the Mega Drive's superior technical abilities, Master System and Game Gear ports were a no-no, so SEGA made a different duck game for its lesser systems. *Lucky Dime Caper* was a classic platformer.

DEEP DUCK TROUBLE



- Master System/GG
- 1993
- You'd have thought that by 1993 SEGA knew what it was doing when it came to Donald Duck and platform games. Sadly, while *Deep Duck Trouble* was certainly very pretty, unresponsive controls and generic levels made it an average game.

DONALD DUCK: MAHOU NO BOUSHI

- SNES
- 1995
- Exclusive to Japan, this little-known Donald game on the SNES was rather like *Donald Duck* on the NES. This action-packed title consisted of various mini-games, many of which were more abstract than those in the earlier track-and-field game.

QUACKSHOT

- Mega Drive
- 1991
- It was a little too easy and way too short, but *Quackshot* was a quality game. Beautiful and full of character, this memorable platformer was unique in that certain levels would only become available when the correct items were found.

MICKEY

WORLD OF ILLUSION

- Mega Drive
- 1992
- Following the success of *Quackshot* and *Castle Of Illusion*, 1992's *World Of Illusion* took ideas from both games. Two players could work together as Mickey and Donald, helping each other overcome all the usual platform obstacles.

MICKEY TO DONALD: MAGICAL ADVENTURE 3

- SNES
- 1995
- Having made various SNES Disney games, Capcom finally produced one featuring Donald. This was the third game in the *Magical Quest* series (which had been rather Mickey-led), but it was never released outside Japan.

BEST OF DISNEY

MAUI MALLARD IN COLD SHADOW



- SNES
- 1996
- You'd think that having ninja abilities would have made this Donald Duck game a hit – especially since it was developed by Capcom. Unfortunately, generic level designs and unresponsive controls made for a remarkably mediocre affair.

SEGA AGES: QUACKSHOT & CASTLE OF ILLUSION

- Saturn
- 1998
- Although you could get *Quackshot* and *Castle Of Illusion* on the Mega Drive for under £10 by 1998, SEGA still thought it would be a good idea to release them on a SEGA Ages pack for the Saturn. The ports were perfect, though hardly worth the price.

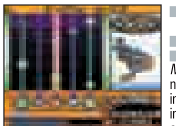
DANCING · **MUSIC** · **RACING** · **HANDHELD** · **ALL OF DISNEY**

DDR FEATURING DISNEY CHARACTERS



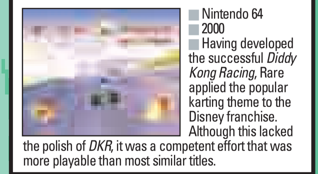
- Nintendo 64
- 2000
- While the N64 wasn't the most versatile console as far as sound was concerned, Konami made the most of it with this Disney-themed *Dance Dance Revolution*. It was possible to pick up a dance mat decorated with Disney characters.

POP 'N MUSIC: DISNEY TUNES



- Arcade/PSone/GBC
- 2000
- Konami's *Pop 'N Music* games have never really taken off in the West. They involve hitting coloured buttons to music (usually J-Pop), but this incarnation featured Donald and friends and some classic Disney songs.

MICKEY'S SPEEDWAY USA



- Nintendo 64
- 2000
- Having developed the successful *Diddy Kong Racing*, Rare applied the popular karting theme to the Disney franchise. Although this lacked the polish of *DKR*, it was a competent effort that was more playable than most similar titles.

DONALD DUCK: QUACK ATTACK

- Multiformat
- 2000
- With Mario and Sonic making the jump to 3D, it wasn't long before other famous faces followed. Donald Duck's 3D debut came in *Quack Attack*, a platformer that mimicked *Crash Bandicoot* and the Mario games. Badly.

DDR: DISNEY MIX

- Arcade/PSone
- 2001
- With Konami's N64 Disney dancing game having sold all of two copies, the company reworked the formula to for *DDR: Disney Mix* (aka *DDR: Disney Rave*). With better sound, this improved edition again featured Donald Duck and other Disney characters.

MICKEY'S SPEEDWAY USA

- Game Boy Color
- 2001
- Following Rare's N64 Disney-themed racer, the company ported the game to the Game Boy Color. A lot like *Super RC Pro-Am*, the game used an isometric viewpoint while retaining most of the elements that made the N64 game so good.

CEL-SHADING

DISNEY SPORTS RANGE

- GC/GBA
- 2002/03
- Konami's *Disney Sports* range offered just about every sport under the sun. But even though Konami was responsible for the seminal *Pro Evo* series, the results here were a mixed bag, from the appalling *DS Skateboarding* to the average *DS Soccer*.

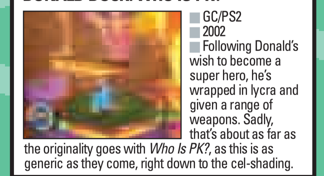
DISNEY GOLF

- PlayStation2
- 2002
- Developed by T&E Soft (the firm behind the *Everybody's Golf* series), *Disney Golf* was certainly eye-catching, but lacking in gameplay. Everything had been simplified for young players, removing much of the skill of *Everybody's Golf*.

DONALD DUCK ADVANCE

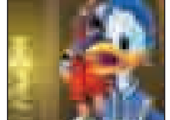
- GBA
- 2002
- For some reason this Donald game went unnoticed, which is a shame as it was created by the people behind *Rayman*. While the gameplay was merely functional, the graphics were some of the most colourful and vibrant on the system.

DONALD DUCK: WHO IS PK?



- GC/PS2
- 2002
- Following Donald's wish to become a super hero, he's wrapped in lycra and given a range of weapons. Sadly, that's about as far as the originality goes with *Who Is PK?*, as this is as generic as they come, right down to the cel-shading.

KINGDOM HEARTS

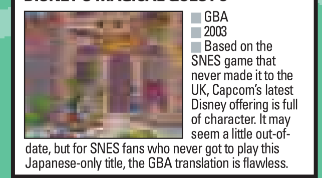
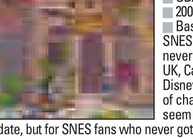



- PlayStation2
- 2002
- Squaresoft brought Disney's characters to life with more passion than any other company had done before. Almost every character was featured here, with some of the favourites (including Donald) working with the protagonist to defeat evil.

DISNEY'S PARTY

- GameCube
- 2003
- With everyone jumping on the *Mario Party* bandwagon, it wasn't long before Disney characters joined in. Sadly, while there's nothing really wrong with *Disney's Party*, there's nothing here that hasn't already been done better by Mario.

DISNEY'S MAGICAL QUEST 3

- GBA
- 2003
- Based on the SNES game that never made it to the UK, Capcom's latest Disney offering is full of character. It may seem a little out-of-date, but for SNES fans who never got to play this Japanese-only title, the GBA translation is flawless.

KINGDOM HEARTS: CHAIN OF MEMORIES

- GBA
- 2004
- Following the success of *Kingdom Hearts, Chain Of Memories* should offer much the same experience to handheld owners. Judging by the quality of *Final Fantasy Tactics Advance* we've got high hopes for this promising title.

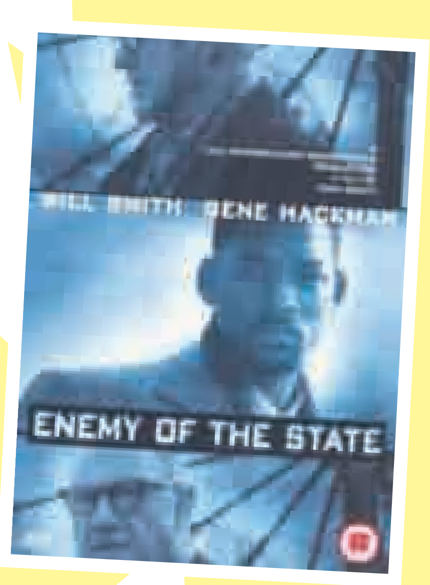
KINGDOM HEARTS 2

- PlayStation2
- 2004
- There are few details available for this sequel, though early screenshots reveal that the game will look even better than its predecessor. There will also be an evil version of Mickey Mouse, though quite how he fits into the story is a mystery.









STAR GAMES!

What's a snazzy little PC Engine GT doing in Enemy Of The State? Upstaging Will Smith and being better than a PlayStation, that's what…

▲ Kudos to Tony Scott for giving NEC's excellent handheld such a major role in such an average film. Where were the Oscar nominations?

Picture the scene: your digital camcorder has just taken pictures of the cold-blooded murder of a congressman and a bunch of government heavies are now trying to break into your apartment. Do you a) quietly hand over the discriminating evidence (facing possible death); b) sell the tape to the highest bidder; or c) make a copy, hide the disk in the back of a totally incompatible PC Engine GT, drop it in one of Will Smith's shopping bags, then get run over by a bus? That's right, it's 'c'.

Despite the rather dubious plot hook, we were more than happy to see one of our favourite consoles get a well-deserved airing, especially in such good condition. The plucky handheld even managed to upstage Sony's PlayStation (Smith's son is playing on one when dad arrives home from work) and dominate every scene it was in. Sadly, after Smith retrieves the GT from his son and removes the important data stored within it, the machine doesn't reappear.

The biggest mystery, though, is where the console came from in the first place. GTs are just as rare in the US as they are over here and its excellent condition leads us to believe that this may well have belonged to someone on the crew. Rumours that it was actually Smith's and that he was spotted playing *King Of Casino* while on the toilet remain just that, rumours…

WHAT WENT WRONG?

OutRun 2019

The ultimate ruination of a classic game



When Yu Suzuki's arcade racer *OutRun* became a huge success in 1986, it was no surprise that SEGA decided to release several follow-ups, not to mention some god-awful home ports (although, to be fair, most of these were by US Gold).

With the classic gameplay mechanics already in place, you'd think it would be easy to improve *OutRun*'s impressive formula. Unfortunately, despite several half-decent releases (*OutRunners*, *Turbo OutRun* and *OutRun Europa*, for instance) Suzuki-san's classic was never rivalled. This was none more apparent than when disappointed Mega Drive owners played the atrocity that was *OutRun 2019*.

Developer Sims co-created a title that shared little in common with its predecessor other than some fast cars. Where *OutRun* was an exhilarating ride through many exotic locations, *OutRun 2019* was a technically polished but dull slog through a generic futuristic setting. Add the fact you were fighting with the steering wheel on every corner and your on-screen alter ego and girlfriend were hidden from view and you got a title that boiled the blood rather than sent it racing.

OutRun 2019 certainly looked great, but poor AI, a lack of difficulty, and some of the worst tunes to emerge from the Mega Drive's sound chip meant that *2019* was an *OutRun* family outcast.



CONTRA (Arcade) Konami, 1987 – Original arcade flyer

Top of the plots

More contrived than EastEnders, stranger than The Twilight Zone, or just plain bad. Are these the ten oddest retro game plots ever?

Nowadays we expect our games to have engrossing and well-written stories, but it hasn't always been this way. In the past, games had stories that were far-fetched, obscure or just plain daft, with little or no bearing on what the game was like. And these are a few of our current favourites…

With so many to choose from, we'd like to get a little input from you. What's the weirdest retro games storyline? Send your thoughts to the usual address and we'll print the results in a future issue.



10. Donkey Kong

Release: 1983
Format: NES
Developer: Nintendo
Publisher: Nintendo

What the manual says: 'Can you save Pauline from the clutches of Donkey Kong? Help Mario scale the construction site to rescue his girlfriend, Pauline. Dodge the fireballs and barrels that Donkey Kong hurls down the ramps and ladders to thwart your efforts.'
What the game does: Um, you scale the construction site on, er, ramps and ladders while avoiding, well, fireballs and barrels, really.
No significant twists, then? Nope. Well, Mario's girlfriend is called Pauline – not Daisy or Peach – but that's about it.
It's not really a story, per se, is it? Not really. You have to rescue Pauline because there's nothing else to do.
But why's she been captured in the first place? Good question.
No, really: We don't know. No-one does. But then we don't need to know why there are huge blocks falling from the sky in *Tetris* in order for it to be a great game, do we?
At any point in the game do you save the world from Deathtarians? Not that we've noticed so far.

9. Mystical Ninja

Release: 1997
Format: N64
Developer: Konami
Publisher: Konami

What the manual says: 'Yikes! A giant UFO shaped like a peach has suddenly appeared in peaceful Oedo Town! The evil musical corps, The Peach Mountain Shoguns, have come to steal the Great Stage Plan… But Goemon and his pals have been so busy eating dumplings they haven't even noticed. Hurry up, Goemon! The Future of Japan depends on you!'
What the game does: You must save Japan, obviously. This involves running around hitting small robotic children (amongst other things) with a pipe (smoker's pipe, not plumber's).
This is a Konami game. Is it wacky? Oh yes. If hitting small robotic children with a pipe isn't odd enough, how about manning a giant robot and kicking the sushi out of a robotic kabuki warrior?
So does the story actually matter? Well, if it wasn't there, there'd be no robotic children for you to hit…
At any point in the game do you save the world from Deathtarians? We didn't notice any, so no.



8. Scorcher



Release: 1996
Format: Saturn
Developer: Zyrinx
Publisher: SEGA

What the manual says: The year 2021… War and pollution have disposed of large parts of humanity and most of the large cities on earth have become abandoned wastelands. Special speed bikes have been invented to travel from complex to complex along the highways. Equipped with a spherical force field, these bikes allow the rider precise control during extremely high speeds. The invention started a whole new sport known to some simply as "Scorcher".'

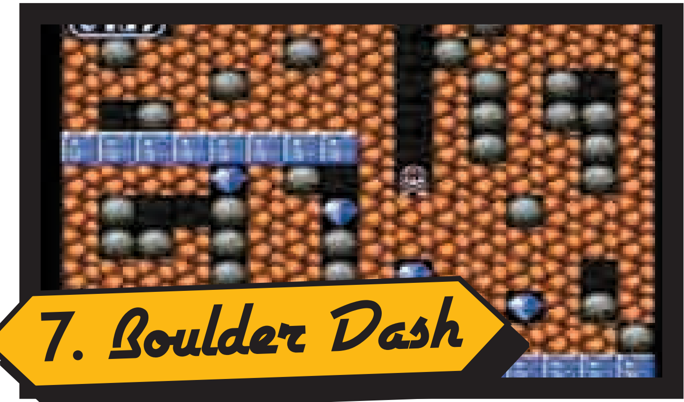
What the game does: You race around in things that look like plastic hamster exercise balls. In the future.

Haven't you got anything better to do? You'd think that people would be preoccupied with sorting out those toxic wastelands – perhaps starting a recycling scheme or something.

Toxic wastelands? This is only 2021: You have 17 years to mend your environmentally unfriendly ways. See – this story has a moral, after all.

At any point in the game do you save the world from Deathtarians? We were going too fast to notice any.

7. Boulder Dash



Release: 1990
Format: NES
Developer: First Star Software
Publisher: Data East

What the manual says: 'Stoneford, an old adventurer ill in bed, called his son, Rockford, to his side. Handing Rockford an old map, he said: "My son, you must take up the quest I never completed. Find the Secret Jewels of the Six Worlds, and you will be rich beyond your wildest dreams!" These were his final words.'

What the game does: You move around in four directions and collect jewels by walking over them. And, er, that's about it.

But there must be some impending doom or something? Sure. Apart from the creepy crawlies that lurk in the caves, there are all those boulders just waiting to drop on your head, hence the name *Boulder Dash*.

Shouldn't Stoneford have handed over the map sooner? You'd think so. Then he could have got Rockford to do all the digging then split the profits – hello, easy retirement.

At any point in the game do you save the world from Deathtarians? Sorry, no Deathtarians here.

6. Virtual Hydlide

Release: 1996
Format: Saturn
Developer: T&E Soft
Publisher: Atlus

What the manual says: 'Princess princess… She is to be queen of the realm, and she has already chosen her consort. You are the bravest and most loyal subject of the realm… A cloud builds above the castle, lightning and thunder surround the parapets… You arrive at the castle a short time later. The ruins tell you little of the events that have taken place. All you know is she is gone. Taken by a powerful evil force. You can feel her – she is still alive… You will follow the trail, fight anything that tries to stop you, and destroy the evil that has taken your queen from her kingdom – and from your side.'

What the game does: You must wander around rough environments hitting blocky sprites. We think you have to find a princess…

That's an old story: No, not old, it's a *classic*. There's a difference.

At any point in the game do you save the world from Deathtarians? No. And if the world looked like this, you'd wouldn't really want to.

5. Yoshi's Story



Release: 1997
Format: N64
Developer: Nintendo
Publisher: Nintendo

What the manual says: 'One day something terrible came to pass at Yoshi's Island. The world became locked in a picture book! The Super Happy Tree was stolen, and this weakened all of the Yoshis… At a remote edge of the island, six eggs hatched. Said one Baby Yoshi to the Little Yoshi, "Oh, my! This is such a big problem for us. What are we to do?" After much discussion, they hatched a plan. By eating lots of fruit, they would be filled with happiness. With all the Yoshis happy, certainly the world would return to normal. So off they went, headed for the last page of the picture book… [to] reclaim the Super Happy Tree!'

What the game does: You, er, eat fruit. Oh, and stamp on baddies.

Sounds a bit druggy: It's Japanese.

Is this a Nintendo game: How could you tell? So colourful. So cute…

At any point in the game do you save the world from Deathtarians? This is a Super Happy game – no Deathtarians here.

4. Greendog



Release: 1992
Format: Mega Drive
Developer: SEGA
Publisher: SEGA

What the manual says: 'As if! Greendog was stylin' until a killer wave beached him! And somehow during the shore pounding a strange pendant got stuck around his neck. Is this a bogus dream or the start of an excellent adventure?… The pendant has a curse, but you can solve it. All you hafta do is find the six pieces of the Surfboard of the Ancients. They were hidden long ago by the Aztecs somewhere in the Caribbean… Not to worry! Greendog's got an awesome flying disc. And he can still carve on his skateboard, in-line skates and pedal-copter. He even scuba dives! So chill, dude. And start shreddin'!'

What the game does: Walk right. Jump over a hole. Walk right. Jump over a hole. Oh yes, we almost forgot – walk right *slowly*. Jump over a gap (if Greendog actually responds to your button press before falling in, that is).

'Awesome flying disc'? It's a Frisbee.

Surfers must have loved this: Don't be silly. They were all busy surfing. People who think surfers talk like that loved this.

At any point in the game do you save the world from Deathtarians? Like, no way, dude.

3. Bubsy



Release: 1992
Format: SNES/Mega Drive
Developer: Accolade
Publisher: Accolade

What the manual says: 'Across the inky velvet reaches of space lie unknown terrors… strange worlds… and even stranger races. There are beings that stretch the very fabric of reality. Beings like the Woolies, whose unbridled lust for yarn is legendary across the galaxies. And no Woolie is more greedy for the furry fiber than the twin queens of Rayon, Poly and Ester…' **Blah blah invasion blah** '…But the Woolies had chosen to invade the space of one purr-fectly fur-ocious feline – a bobcat ready, wooling and able to defend the rights of the downtrodden, smite the evil doers… and to generally act in a heroic and politically correct manner… And so begins the spell-binding, fast-paced, nail-biting, action-packed blockbuster that is… *Claws Encounters Of The Furred Kind*.'

What the game does: Bubsy runs at Mach 4 but can only withstand a single hit. Of course, he does have nine lives – he's a cat, you see.

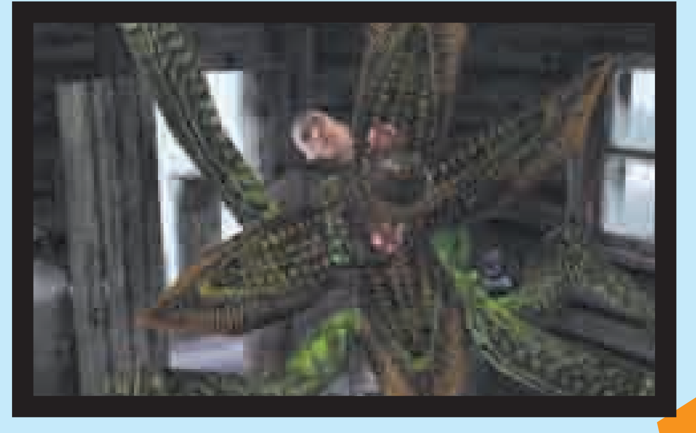
Cheesy story…: Like a pound of stilton left in the sun for two days.

It's hardly Chekov, is it? No, you'll want *Aero The Acrobat* for that…

At any point in the game do you save the world from Deathtarians? No. Cat-egorically. Ahem.

2. D2





Release: 1999
Format: Dreamcast
Developer: Warp
Publisher: SEGA

What the manual says: 'Canada, Christmas 2000… In the skies over Canada, Laura's plane has been hijacked by terrorists… In one of the seats a black-robed magician gazes into a crystal, chanting the phrase "Shadow, the final destroyer." … Laura's compact begins to glow. A vision of a meteorite hurtling towards the Earth is reflected in the mirror. Suddenly the plane is struck by the same meteorite that appeared in the vision, and falls towards the frozen tundra below. In the middle of a raging blizzard, Laura opens her eyes to find herself inside a mountain cabin…Ten days have passed since the crash but Laura can remember nothing, not even her name. The door of the cabin opens and one of the terrorists enters. While Laura stares in horror, he transforms into a hideous monster. He is not the only one. Other crash survivors and locals have mutated into terrifying monstrosities and attacked people. Is there anyway to survive this living nightmare?'

What the game does: You wander around in the snow for four discs, then get rescued. It's absolutely action-packed. Really, it is.

It all sounds a bit far-fetched: Yes, well, it's sci-fi innit? And it's Japanese. Oh, and it's by Kenji Eno.

Kenji Eno? Serves home-made curry at industry launches and puts parking tickets on guests' cars 'for a laugh'. Crazy name, crazy guy.

Laura? Sounds a bit like Lara: No – her second name's Parton, not Croft. And no, before you ask she's no relation to Dolly either. Or any other busty ladies for that matter.

At any point in the game do you save the world from Deathtarians? There are plenty of marauding pot plants but no Deathtarians. Sorry.

1. Atomic Runner

Release: 1992
Format: Mega Drive
Developer: Data East
Publisher: SEGA

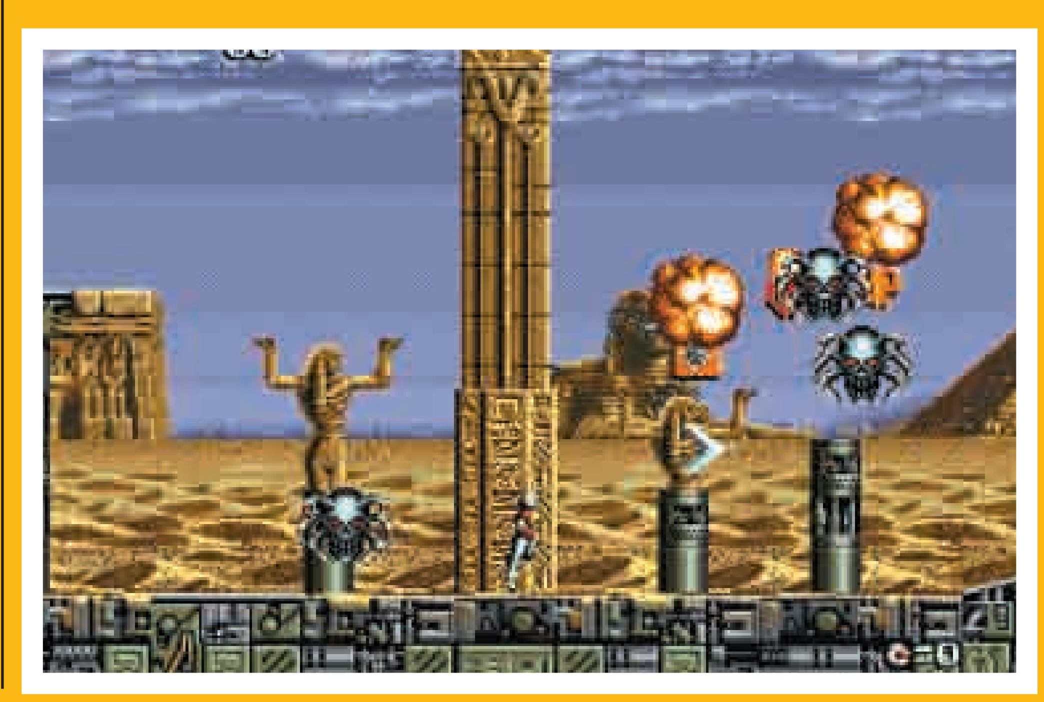
What the manual says: 'Chelnov was a young scientist. He lived and worked side-by-side with his father and his sister, and together they led a happy, peaceful life. But the harmony of their lives was about to be ripped open…' **Yes, yes, get on with it.** '"This explosion… this is the work of the Deathtarians! [said Chelnov's dying father] They claim to be the original inhabitants of Earth, coming from a time before the dawn of man, and now they say they have returned to reclaim what is rightfully theirs!"' **Skip the bit about the kidnapped sister and the super-human suit…** 'Determined to avenge his father's death and his sister's abduction, Chelnov donned the suit to become the Atomic Runner. Go Atomic Runner!! Save the world from the sinister plans of a twisted band of outlaw aliens! But the sheer numbers of the Deathtarians overwhelmed the Atomic Runner, and he was soon trapped by them. He was subjected to inhuman tortures, and attempts at brainwashing. Just as the Deathtarians were convinced they were about to break his will, the Atomic Runner lashed out in anger and broke free from his captors. Run in! Atomic Runner!! I will not fail. No enemy can put a stop to justice!'

What the game does: You are a miniscule stick man. You fire tiny orbs of energy. Hardly seemed worth it.

How come Chelnov's sister wasn't killed in the blast too? We're not too sure. Perhaps she was wearing a suit of armour, or something. They seem like a bit of an eccentric family, so she might have been.

Just a bit eccentric? When was the last time you met a family of scientists who did nothing but work on experiments in their lab all day? Yeah but no but yeah but no but like maybe they're just like *really* eccentric anyway it's just this thing what you know nothing about.

At any point in the game do you save the world from Deathtarians? Hundreds of them, all over the shop. We have a winner.





Look Back In Anger

They called V-Rally a SEGA Rally beater, but then what do they know?



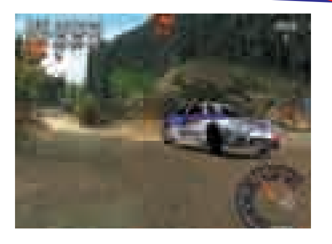
While Saturn owners were enjoying a wonderful translation of the arcade hit *SEGA Rally*, PlayStation gamers were having to make do with *Ridge Racer*, which by 1997 was already looking fairly dated. What Sony needed was a lifelike rally game with plenty of tracks, licensed cars and ultra-realistic handling, and that's exactly what Infogrames attempted to provide with *V-Rally*; 'attempted' being the most important word in this instance. You see, despite receiving review scores in the nineties in most videogame magazines, *V-Rally* was a pretty average racer.

With 42 tracks and semi-realistic weather and lighting effects, things started well. What's more, the graphics engine was perfectly competent, and the crispness and variety of the textures was second-to-none. However, as soon as you got behind the wheel, things took a turn for the worse…

Two views were available – behind the car or first-person – though neither of them allowed the level of precision that *SEGA Rally* had offered on the Saturn. From inside the car the movement was far too frantic, but when behind it the camera swung rapidly from side to side, making it difficult to travel in a straight line.

To increase your frustration the handling was far too twitchy and the dynamics were such that if you were to clip so much as a blade of grass your car would be sent into an uncontrollable spin.

When *V-Rally* later launched in America (published by EA under name *The Need For Speed: V-Rally*), the majority of review scores were substantially lower.



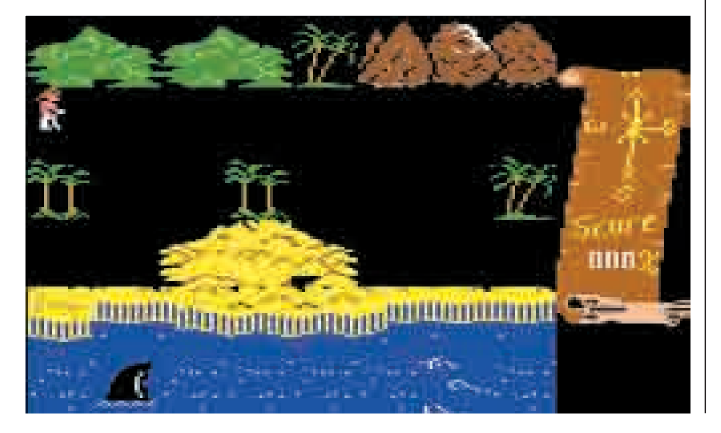


▲ Whoa, careful now. Don't hit that *tiny* bit of grit or you'll be sent all over the place.

GAMES THAT TIME FORGOT…

TREASURE ISLAND

Thanks to *Pirates Of The Caribbean* (the movie, not the game), pirates are cool again. Unfortunately, aside from *Galleon* (which may or may not turn out to be any good), there are few other pirate-based games around these days – a shame considering how great titles such as *Monkey Island* were. Of course, *Monkey Island* wasn't the first pirate-oriented videogame – go back further to the days of the C64 and Spectrum and you'll discover a handful of similarly themed titles; games like Paul Ismail and Greg Duddle's *Treasure Island*.



Programmed initially for the Spectrum, and later the C64, *Treasure Island* was a straightforward action adventure game in which you had to work your way around a map, defeating pirates as you went. Naturally, things were never going to be that simple, and thanks to a severe shortage of cutlasses it wasn't always easy to progress. In fact, if you used too many cutlasses on pirates that didn't really need to be destroyed it was impossible to get any further.

Still, this was early in the evolution of videogames, and even the programmers themselves admit that they had difficulties. "It was influenced by the early Ultimate games, as we were both fans," says Duddle (who was responsible for the C64 version), "though our programming skills were certainly not on a par with theirs as we were both novices at the time." Incidentally, Duddle has remained in the videogames industry and is currently working as a producer for Sony.

Presentation: **60%**
Graphics: **80%**
Playability: **72%**
Longevity: **59%**

Overall: **71%**

GREAT GAME BOSSES



Call us predictable but surely this is one of the best showdowns in gaming?



CERVANTES/SOUL EDGE Soul Blade

Beat-'em-up bosses have a notoriously hard life – getting the perfect balance of difficulty and reward without making them frustratingly cheap is an area in which many fighting games have fallen in the past (and is why *Street Fighter III*'s Gill will never be gracing this section).

This is also why many fighters attempt to do something different with the final battle – the crazy effects of the *Dead Or Alive* games and the over-the-top guardians of the *Vs* series spring to mind. But this is the polar opposite of the climax of Namco's superb PSone fighter *Soul Blade*, where the final boss was little more than a hellish version of the previous battler. Not that this is a bad thing, of course.

Having slogged your way through to the tenth round in sequence, you find yourself pitted against powerful pirate Cervantes. He's clearly cheating by brandishing two oversized blades, and beating him is a feat in itself. Then just when you thought things couldn't get any nastier… well, they do.

The remains of the seafaring warrior are suddenly consumed by light and reanimated by the evil spirit of the Soul Edge itself, leaving you just a single option – one final duel. The fiery warrior fights much like the previous owner of the blade, albeit it with a few devastating attacks of his own; defeating him (it?) is no mean feat.

But as you duke it out in the most surreal of locales – the stage of history, it would appear, is a curious pink and purple arena full of floating debris – you'll soon learn how best to deal with Soul Edge and, slowly, you're able to gradually whittle his health down.

With one final crushing blow, the manifestation of pure evil fades to dust with only a pair of cursed blades as proof of its existence But what will become of the most evil of weapons? That all depends on whose hands it ends up in…





LAST MONTH'S GAME BOY SCREENSHOTS

Who says that monochrome screenshots all look the same? All these looked quite different…

FIRST ROW
V-Rally
Alien³
Bugs Bunny
Bonk's Adventure
Pac-Man
Alfred Chicken
Final Fantasy Legend
Battleship
Adventure Island
Brain Bender

SECOND ROW
Chase HQ
Casper
Marble Madness
Burger Time Deluxe
Flappy Special
Bionic Commando
Best Of The Best
Dennis The Menace
Bill & Ted's Excellent Game Boy Adventure
Bust-A-Move 2

THIRD ROW
Addams Family
Mega Man 2
Lemmings
Cliff Hanger
Terminator 2
Godzilla
Final Fantasy Adventure
Elevator Action
Alleyway
Darkwing Duck

FOURTH ROW
Beetlejuice
Battletoads
Hudson Hawk
Duck Tales
Tetris
Barbie
Parasol Stars
Robocop 2
Dick Tracy
Super RC Pro-Am

FIFTH ROW
Super Mario Land
Lion King
Mortal Kombat
Mortal Kombat 2
Days Of Thunder
Blades Of Steel
Contra
Paperboy
Boxing
Ultra Golf

SIXTH ROW
Cool World
Batman The Animated Series
Bomb Jack
Chuck Rock
R-Type 2
Break Thru
Jungle Strike
Pugsley's Scavenger Hunt
Tennis
Boulder Dash

SEVENTH ROW
Baseball
Bram Stoker's Dracula
Bubble Bobble Jr.
Yoshi's Cookie
Pit Fighter
Mickey Mouse II
Joe & Mac
Super Mario Land 2: 6 Golden Coins
Robocop
Taz-Mania

This Month:

Step-by-Step

CYBERNOID

A

STEPS 1-3

Get past screen one's missiles, then use your rockets on the next to clear a path below you. Immediately fly to the left and shoot as much as possible. Exit bottom-left (grabbing the shield as you go).

B

STEPS 4-6

Quickly drop into the first gap, let the Caterpillars pass over you, then quickly exit on the top-left. Avoid the bullets from the large honeycomb and activate the missiles by passing under them. Negotiate the next screen, then exit bottom-left.

B

C

STEPS 7-9

The next three screens are relatively easy (especially if you've got the shield). Simply shoot as many foes as possible while making your way to the right of the screen. Use rockets to destroy the honeycomb in the next room, then simply clear the final screen.

C

G

G

STEPS 20-23

You'll have to hide behind several pillars to clear the next room. After that, it's a case of flying through the remaining rooms while avoiding the Pirates. Then dock your ship and count your booty.

After the release of *Exolon*, Raffaele Cecco was on a winning streak that included the likes of *Stormlord* and the underrated *007: Licence To Kill*. His follow-up to *Exolon* was the excellent 1986 shooter *Cybernoid*, a hectic flick-screen title that tested gamers' reactions and sanity to their limits.

Despite the game's difficulty, the chance to traverse the highly detailed areas (well, for an Amstrad, anyway) and hunt down Space Pirates proved too good an opportunity to miss, and gamers were once again utterly entranced.

We'll guide you through the second stage of this rock-hard shoot-'em-up. Just don't say we didn't warn you about the difficulty level…

E

STEPS 13-15

This is easily the hardest part of the level. Over the next two screens, use the same tactics as before to dodge the Caterpillars. You then need to make your way to the bottom of the third screen while avoiding some very quick Pirates.

A

E

F

D

F

STEPS 16-19

Blow up the barrier then carefully drop down to the bottom of the screen. Destroy the statue blocking your exit, then dodge past the next room's massive barrage of missiles. Drop down to the next screen to find a huge selection of power-ups and plenty of booty. Exit bottom-left.

D

STEPS 10-12

Screen ten shouldn't be a problem, but the next is pretty tricky. Dodge the bullets on the second screen by hiding behind each large pillar. Blast the blocks in your way and exit top right.



Share your views about old-school gaming

First Contact

If you're into retro gaming and you've got something to share with the world, why not write to us at: games™ Retro, Highbury Entertainment Ltd, Paragon House, St Peter's Road, Bournemouth, Dorset, BH1 2JS Or you can email: gamestm@paragon.co.uk

APPLE OF HIS EYE

Dear games™

Every issue you feature a defunct console from yesteryear, but they are always common ones like the N64 or Mega Drive. Can you do a feature on the Pippin Atmark? I'm a massive fan of gaming oddities and would like to know more about this rare machine, its software and its peripherals. There is some info on the net, but it's largely just pictures with Japanese text. Only your infinite wisdom can shed some light on this forgotten console for us obsessive retro fans!

Tom Charnock, Manchester

■ **We've had a lot of letters asking us to feature lesser-known retro formats, but we decided to print yours because of that 'infinite wisdom' remark… In response to your question, we will indeed be giving more space to rarer machines in the future. We've already got a few less mainstream machines lined up so you may have to wait a while for the Pippin. But we'll see what we can do. We are infinitely wise, after all.**

FIRE BRIGADE

Dear games™

I can't believe you remember *Fire Ant* on the C64. I played that game for hours but absolutely no-one seems to remember it. All that stuff about the ending brought back so many memories. Those were the days!

Jez Longham, via email

■ **Each time we feature a game that time forgot, we hear from people who remember it and have been happily reminded of a lost love. Kind of like *Casablanca* but without the heartache. And Nazis. *Fire Ant* really was quite an unusual choice, though – even some of the games™ team didn't remember it so it must be obscure. Perhaps we should have re-named the article Games That Absolutely Everyone (Except For Jez Longham) Forgot…**

TOO BAD, THREE BAD?

Dear games™

In your last issue (**games**™ 15) you dedicated half a page to *Crazy Taxi 2* and pointed out all the things that were wrong with it. I agree that the original was a far better game, but in my opinion the third game is the worst of them all. I mean that Las Vegas track – what was all that about? Considering that it was running on the Xbox, there was no excuse for all those blurry textures and all that terrible pop-up, not to mention the slowdown.

Barry Fergus, via email

■ **We totally agree that *Crazy Taxi 3* was a disappointment, though whether or not it's as bad as the second game is questionable. Glitter Oasis (as the Las Vegas track was called) featured plenty of hills and valleys, even**

Killer App

Dear Retro,

In your last issue (**games**™ 15), you had a page asking 'why don't they remake *Killer Instinct*?'. The text said that pressure from gamers for a third title is still strong, and I'm one of those gamers. Although I had the SNES and N64 versions, neither of them could compete with the original arcade game. I'd really like it if Microsoft released a retro pack for the Xbox as the machine would be able to replicate the arcade game perfectly.

I've also been looking on the internet to see if I can find any details about *Killer Instinct 3*, and a lot of people seem to think that Rare might be making the game for the Xbox. Do you think that the rumours could be true? I'm keeping my fingers crossed.

Jon Goldsmith, via email



■ **Although rumours of a new *Killer Instinct* have been going around for some time, they were fuelled recently when a green DVD box with 'KI III' printed on the side of it was spotted on a shelf in *Grabbed By The Ghoulies*. However, many of Rare's other titles were also featured in the game, so the chances are it was purely coincidental. Besides, after *GBTG* performed so badly at retail (apparently only 17,000 copies were sold in America), we suspect that Microsoft may be watching over the company with a critical eye for the foreseeable future.**

But don't be disheartened – Microsoft bought Rare for its game titles as much as anything else, so it's extremely likely that franchises such as *Killer Instinct* will make an appearance at some point. Just don't expect it any time soon.



Dear games™
Let's just make one thing clear: yes, the CD-i failed, yes, it had the worst *Zelda* games ever conceived (although the final game in the series wasn't that bad) and, yes, the earlier models would make a pretty good substitute for the cat's litter tray.

So you might think I wasn't a great fan of the CD-i, but you'd be wrong. For too long it's been cast away and completely overlooked as a retro gaming platform, though, admittedly, your publication has provided limited coverage on the system. Some articles, such as 'The Living Dead' (issue 3), with updates on older gamers' ambitions to release new games on the ageing machine have come as welcome news.

However, you've completely missed out on the secret history of CD-i. For example, did you know that a near-identical version of *Super Mario World* was reproduced on the CD-i under the working title of *Super Mario's Wacky Worlds*? I doubt many of your readers have heard of this game and the thought of it would probably make many Mario fans a little hot and sweaty.

It's time to discard the old image and take a peak beneath the black exterior of CD-i to find what secrets lurked within its past.
Devin Shockwell (devoted CD-i explorer)

■ Due to the current layout of the Retro section it's difficult to give the CD-i the space it deserves; at the moment our 'machine of the month' section requires screenshots of 70 or 80 games, and there simply weren't enough titles released for us to fill two pages. However, such things are likely to change in the near future. For a start there aren't that many retro formats left that we can find 80 screenshots for, so that particular section will no doubt be getting a new look, perhaps ushering in a new age of CD-I worship.

As for the 'secret history' of CD-i – you're quite right, we had no idea that projects such as *Mario's Wacky Worlds* existed, and it's something we'd like to look into in the future. In the meantime, for anyone interested in learning a little more about Philips' ill-fated console-cum-home entertainment system, why not take a look at www.classicgaming.com/blackmoon which highlights many of the nuances of the CD-i. Thanks to Devin for the link.

if it was confusing to find your way around. Plus it made use of a number of the Xbox's lighting effects. Besides, you could select the standard track from the original game in *Crazy Taxi 3*, which helped to redeem the overall package. The Apple tracks in the second game, on the other hand, were almost totally flat, as well as colourless. Hardly crazy at all.

RE-USE, RE-CYCLE...

Dear games™
Has anyone noticed that *Mobile Light Force* for the PSone is now on sale at Morrisons for £7.99? This is actually Psikyo's *Gunbird* but with a different name and packaging. If gamers have paid out £40 or £50 for the original version it must be very annoying to find the same game, albeit with a different identity, on sale for a lot less.

However, for any publishers looking to do the same re-name/re-package/re-sell on other old shoot-'em-ups, I know a little game called *Radiant Silvergun* that would definitely sell well for £7.99!
Darren Stoggles, Ipswich

■ Budget PSone titles such as this are certainly good value, though it's worth remembering that things aren't always the bargains they seem to be. Many software titles that are repackaged are stripped of all their style and, in some cases, their playability. In this case, however, the gameplay hasn't been affected by the graphical changes, and the sound effects are actually exactly the same as the original Saturn game.

As for *Radiant Silvergun* – that's something we'd all like to happen, but as long as Treasure is involved it's unlikely that a budget release will ever happen. Incidentally, gamers in the south of England who can't get to a branch of Morrisons may soon be able to get hold of similar bargains in their local Safeway following the companies' merger.





C·L·A·S·S·I·C C·O·N·S·O·L·E

BUYERS GUIDE QUICK REFERENCE



It might be easy to play retro games through emulation, but there's nothing quite like owning the original system – that musty smell of ancient electronics can never really be replicated with a PC. Of course, there's always a price to pay and unscrupulous dealers are out to make a quick buck, but you really don't have to pay through the nose if you look in the right places. Charity shops, car boot sales and eBay are all good places to start, but before you do, use our guide to see how much you should be paying…

3DO

Panasonic 3DO	£60
Goldstar 3DO	£50-60

ACORN COMPUTERS

BBC Micro	£50
Acorn Electron	£40

AMSTRAD

Amstrad CPC 464	£20
Amstrad CPC 664	£20-25
Amstrad CPC 6128	£25
Amstrad GX4000	£50

ATARI

Atari VCS 2600	£30 (wooden models tend to cost more)
Atari ST	£40 (with software)
Atari Lynx	£35 (the original model costs less)
Atari Jaguar	£25

COMMODORE

Commodore Vic 20	£15-20
Commodore 64	£25-35 (varies according to model)
Commodore Amiga	£35-40 (varies according to model)
Commodore CDTV	£50-60
C64GS	£50 (becoming more sought-after)
Commodore CD32	£35

MISC

GCE Vectrex (General Consumer Electronics)	£20-250
MB Vectrex (Milton Bradley)	£175-200
JAMMA compatible cabinets	£100-350 (depending on model)
Supergun	£150-200 (varies according to model)

NEC

PC Engine	£70-80
Turbo Grafx-16	£50-60
Turbo Duo	£100-150
PC Engine GT	£150-200
Super Grafx	£200-250

NINTENDO

Game & Watch	£15-50 (depending on title)
Nintendo Entertainment System	£15-20
Game Boy/Game Boy Pocket	£10
Game Boy Color	£15
Super Nintendo	£20-25
Virtual Boy	£75-100
Nintendo 64	£20-25

SEGA

Master System	£20
Mega Drive	£20-25
Game Gear	£35-40
Mega CD	£40-60
SEGA 32X	£30
SEGA Nomad	£75-100
SEGA Saturn	£30
Dreamcast	£25-30

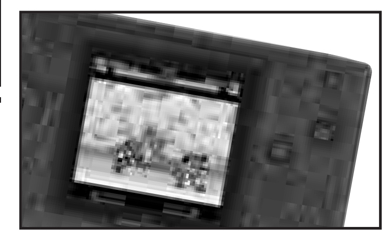
SINCLAIR

Sinclair ZX-81	£40
ZX Spectrum 48K	£40-50
ZX Spectrum +	£30
ZX Spectrum 128K	£40
ZX Spectrum +2	£35
ZX Spectrum +3	£40

SNK

Neo Geo MVS Single Slot (Arcade system)	£70 (prices for multi-slots are higher)
Neo Geo AES (home system)	£175-225
Neo Geo CD	£125-175
Neo Geo CDZ	£150-175
Neo Geo Pocket Color	£40-50

CONSOLE OF THE MONTH



- **NAME:** NEO GEO POCKET COLOR
- **PRICE:** £40-50
- **THREE OF THE BEST:**
  Faselei (est. price £70+)
  Fatal Fury F Contact (est. price £15)
  Metal Slug: 2nd Mission (est. price £35)
- Although SNK's NGPC was a flop in the UK, it has since built up a cult following, and for 2D beat-'em-up fans the machine still has a lot going for it.

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GAMES TRADING MARKET

Searching for an elusive copy of Radiant Silvergun? Want to sell that pile of Spectrum games taking up space around the house? Then check out GTM, the most authentic retro sales column in the world.

FOR SALE

Lot 50 – Boxed SEGA Saturn with 12 games, all boxed with instructions. All leads, two pads and one demo disc included, though the console box is missing its internal packaging. £60. Lancashire.

Lot 51 – *Final Fantasy VIII* (PAL) for PSone. Boxed but no instructions. £3.50 plus p+p. North Yorkshire.

Lot 52 – *Hellfire* (NTSC) for Mega Drive. Boxed, instructions. £3 plus p+p. North Yorkshire.

Lot 53 – *Knight Lore* for Spectrum. Boxed, instructions. £1 plus p+p. North Yorkshire.

Lot 54 – *Star Wars Arcade* for Atari VCS. Boxed with instructions. £8 plus p+p. North Yorkshire.

Lot 55 – *Uridium* for C64. Boxed with instructions. £1 plus p+p. North Yorkshire.

Lot 56 – *King Of Fighters 2002* (Japanese version) for Neo Geo AES. Mint condition. £220. Gloucester.

Lot 57 – *Samurai Spirits 4* (Japanese version) for Neo Geo AES. Mint condition. £250. Gloucester.

Lot 58 – *Soukyogurentai (Otokuyo)* (Japanese version) for SEGA Saturn. Mint condition with spine card. £50. Gloucester.

Lot 59 – *Ghost In The Shell* (PAL) for PSone. Mint condition. £15. Gloucester.

Lot 60 – *Street Fighter III: 3rd Strike* for SEGA Dreamcast. Mint condition. £25. Gloucester.

Lot 61 – *Bubble Bobble* (UK version) for Commodore 64. Complete. 50p plus p+p. North Yorkshire.

Lot 62 – *Escape From Singe's Castle* (UK version) for Commodore 64. £1 plus p+p. North Yorkshire.

Lot 63 – *Streets Of Rage 2* (PAL) for SEGA Mega Drive. Complete. £3 plus p+p. North Yorkshire.

Lot 64 – *Battle Squadron* (UK version) for Mega Drive. Boxed with instructions. £2 plus p+p. Bristol. Contact seller directly: garethcrowley@hotmail.com

Lot 65 – *Circus* (UK version) for Atari 2600. Boxed with instructions. £3.50 plus p+p. Bristol. Contact seller directly: garethcrowley@hotmail.com

Lot 66 – *F/A-18 Interceptor* (UK version) for Amiga. Boxed with instructions. £2. Bristol. Contact seller directly: garethcrowley@hotmail.com

Lot 67 – *Golden Axe 3* (Japanese version) for Mega Drive. Boxed with instructions. £25 plus p+p. Contact seller directly: garethcrowley@hotmail.com

Lot 68 – *Virtua Fighter Remix* (Japanese version) for Saturn. Boxed with instructions. £3.50 plus p+p. Contact seller directly: garethcrowley@hotmail.com

WANTED

WANTED 27 – **SNES or Mega Drive**. Will pay up to £20. Bristol.

WANTED 28 – **Any interesting JAMMA arcade boards**, arcade cabinets etc. Also looking for a Neo Geo MVS motherboard.

WANTED 29 – *Samba De Amigo* plus maracas for SEGA Dreamcast. Will pay well. Warwickshire.

WANTED 30 – *Burning Rangers* for SEGA Saturn (UK or US versions only). Will pay £20-£30. Middlesex.

WANTED 31– *Panzer Dragoon Saga* for SEGA Saturn (UK or US versions only). Will pay £60-£85. Middlesex.

WANTED 32 – Two MB Vectrex control pads plus any other related accessories in good working order. West Mids.

WANTED 33 – ***Metal Slug 3*** for Neo Geo (AES). Must be complete and in good condition. Gloucester.

WANTED 34 – ***Disc World*** for PlayStation. Must be complete and in good condition. Gloucester.

WANTED 35 – *The King Of Fighters 2001* or *2002* for Neo Geo AES. Must be boxed with manual. Good price paid. Derbyshire.

WANTED 36 – Commodore 64 and any games published by either Hewson or 21st Century Entertainment. Manchester.

WANTED 37 – *Super Bomberman* for Super Nintendo.

WANTED 38 – *Mean Machines* magazines. Any issues, but not 3, 14, 15 or 19. Must be in good condition. Price negotiable. London.

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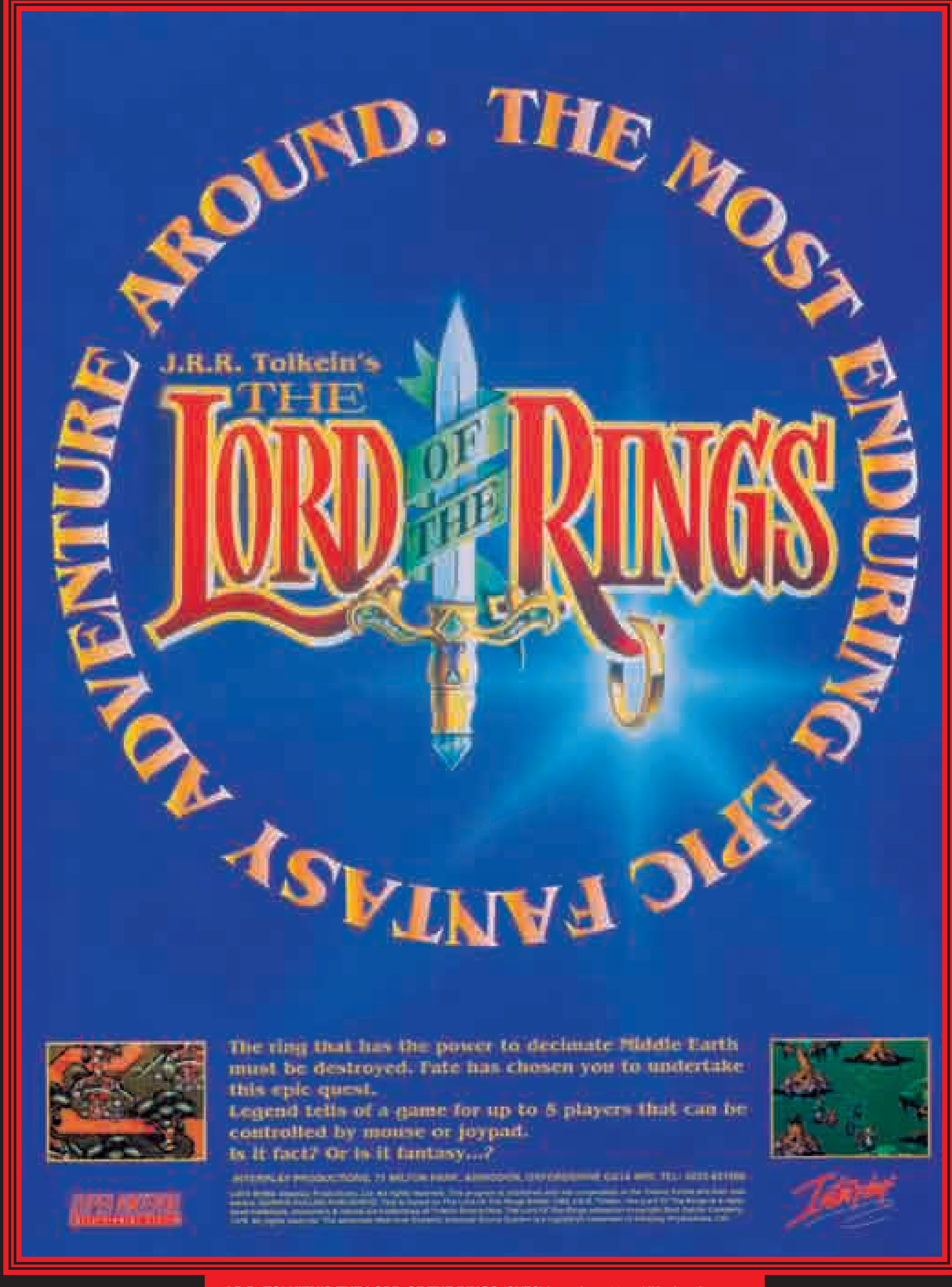
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J.R.R. TOLKIEN'S THE LORD OF THE RINGS (SNES) Interplay, 1994 – UK advertisement


eMag

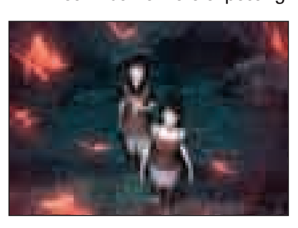
ESSENTIALS

TOO MANY GAMES, NOT ENOUGH MONEY. THANKFULLY, NOT ALL OF THEM ARE WORTH SPENDING YOUR HARD-EARNED CASH ON. IF YOU WANT TO TASTE THE CREAM OF THE CROP, YOU'VE COME TO THE RIGHT PLACE…

VIEWPOINT

FATAL FRAME 2: CRIMSON BUTTERFLY

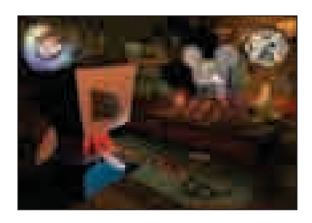
Note to Tecmo – with the first *Project Zero* being a new benchmark in survival horror, we'd hoped the sequel would have been even better. That's not to say this is a bad game, just not what we were expecting.



VIEWPOINT

GREGORY HORROR SHOW

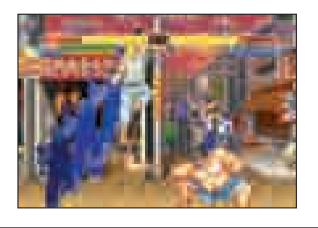
It's £20 and possibly one of the strangest, most enjoyable games we've played for ages – what more reason do you need to buy this? Still, we're willing to bet that finding it in your local videogame shop won't be easy.



VIEWPOINT

HYPER STREET FIGHTER II: 15TH ANNIVERSARY

Out now in Japan, this PS2 re-release of not one, but five *Street Fighter II* titles in a single package is enough to give you flashbacks to your childhood. We've played it so much we're starting to develop over-sized hands…



PLAYSTATION2

MANUFACTURER Sony **UK LAUNCH DATE** 24 November 2000 **MEDIA** 4.75-inch DVD Disc **CURRENT PRICE** £139.99



The oldest of the next-generation consoles, having had well over a year's head start over both the GameCube and Xbox. With support across the board from third-party developers, a built-in DVD player and backward compatibility with older PSone games, it's the most popular videogame console available today.

TWENTY MUST-HAVE PLAYSTATION2 GAMES

No.	Title	Publisher	Developer	Comment
1	Ico	SCEE	In-House	Possibly the most beautiful game ever made
2	Grand Theft Auto: Vice City	Rockstar Games	Rockstar North	Enough content to keep you going for ages
3	Pro Evolution Soccer 3	Konami	In-House	If you only own one football game, it should be this
4	Disgaea: Hour Of Darkness IMPORT	Atlus	Nippon Ichi	Like your RPGs practically endless? Then this is for you
5	Dark Chronicle	Sony	In-House	In-depth RPGs don't come much bigger than this
6	Prince Of Persia: The Sands Of Time	Ubisoft	In-House	Ubisoft shows how to make a proper retro update
7	Rez	SEGA	UGA	Deceptively simple – draws you in before you know it
8	Amplitude	Sony	Harmonix	Music games have never needed as much skill as this
9	Beyond Good & Evil	Ubisoft	In-House	A fine example of adventuring; well worth the wait
10	Tony Hawk's Underground	Activision	Neversoft	The defining moment in the *Tony Hawk* series
11	SSX 3	Electronic Arts	EA Sports BIG	The *Tony Hawk* of the snowboarding world
12	Suikoden III IMPORT	Konami	In-House	Konami's RPG series is still as good as it ever was
13	Metal Slug 3 IMPORT	Playmore	In-House	Old-school shooting has never been so much fun
14	Freedom Fighters	Electronic Arts	Io Interactive	Top-notch squad-based action with an arcade twist
15	NBA Street 2	Electronic Arts	EA Sports BIG	The daddy of basketball games – no contest
16	Colin McRae Rally 04	Codemasters	In-House	Realistic racing for the purist in all of us
17	Project Zero	Wanadoo	Tecmo	Scarier than anything else out there today
18	Burnout 2: Point Of Impact	Acclaim	Criterion	Arcade racing at its purest – fun with a capital F
19	Hitman 2: Silent Assassin	Eidos	Io Interactive	Silent but deadly – a real killer of a game
20	Devil May Cry	Capcom	In-House	The original is still the best by a long shot

LAY ON FIVE

Ico

By now you should have realised that we're not going to stop telling you to buy *Ico*. It's a crime if you don't.



GTA: Vice City

Rockstar's free-roaming franchise just keeps on rolling. No doubt the twin pack will sell like mad…



Pro Evolution Soccer 3

Considering Konami's series exists, you have to wonder why other people keep making footy games.



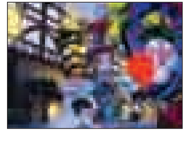
Disgaea

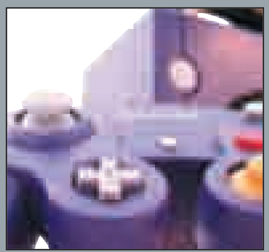
You know how we said that *Dark Chronicle* was big? Well, this is bigger. Shame it's only out on import.



Dark Chronicle

Of course, PAL gamers can still take solace in the fact that Sony's epic RPG is pretty damn huge too.






XBOX

MANUFACTURER Microsoft **UK LAUNCH DATE** 13 March 2002 **MEDIA** 4.75-inch DVD Disc **CURRENT PRICE** £129.99



Despite a slow start, the Xbox has swiftly become one of the major players in today's console market. Suggestions that the machine is only 'a PC in a box' are founded upon the built-in hard drive, broadband support and DVD player. However, the Xbox is far more accessible to the casual gamer than most PCs.

TWENTY MUST-HAVE XBOX GAMES

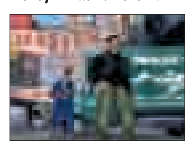
No.	Title	Publisher	Developer	Comment
1	Project Gotham Racing 2	Microsoft	Bizarre Creations	Redefining how we play games online
2	Grand Theft Auto: Double Pack	Rockstar Games	Rockstar North	The best versions of *GTA III* and *Vice City*, without a doubt
3	Halo	Microsoft	Bungie	The game that sold a million Xbox consoles
4	Jet Set Radio Future	SEGA	Smilebit	Cel-shading at its very best and a soundtrack to die for
5	Knights Of The Old Republic	Activision	BioWare	One of the best *Star Wars* games ever made
6	Splinter Cell	Ubisoft	In-House	Who needs Solid Snake when you've got Sam Fisher?
7	TimeSplitters 2	Eidos	Free Radical	More multiplayer fun than most other FPS games
8	Panzer Dragoon Orta	SEGA	Smilebit	Classic shoot-'em-up action, the SEGA way
9	Tony Hawk's Underground	Activision	Neversoft	The defining moment in the *Tony Hawk* series
10	Project Zero	Microsoft	Tecmo	Scarier than anything else out there today
11	Burnout 2: Point Of Impact	Acclaim	Criterion Studios	Arcade racing at its purest – fun with a capital F
12	Beyond Good & Evil	Ubisoft	In-House	A fine example of adventuring; well worth the wait
13	Soul Calibur II	Namco	In-House	The leader of the pack when it comes to swordplay
14	SSX 3	Electronic Arts	EA Sports BIG	The *Tony Hawk* of the snowboarding world
15	Moto GP	THQ	Climax	Bargain-priced motorbike racing action
16	Hitman 2: Silent Assassin	Eidos	Io Interactive	Silent but deadly – a real killer of a title
17	Aggressive Inline	Acclaim	Z-Axis	Surprisingly enjoyable, considering the competition
18	Freedom Fighters	Electronic Arts	Io Interactive	Top-notch squad-based action with an arcade twist
19	Colin McRae Rally 04	Codemasters	In-House	Realistic racing for the purist in all of us
20	Tiger Woods 2004	Electronic Arts	In-House	Young Mr Woods shows us all how it should be done

ON THE SIDE

Project Gotham Racing 2
We admit it – we're addicted to online racing. If only because it means we've got loads more friends.



GTA: Double Pack
Rockstar's belated release of the PS2's best-selling titles has 'value for money' written all over it.



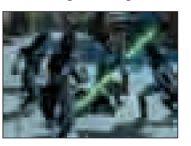
Halo
Great AI, but is it really the best Xbox game ever? Hopefully, the arrival of the sequel will answer that.



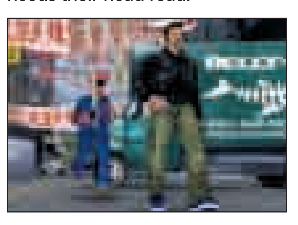
Jet Set Radio Future
It might have a lot to answer for as far as cel-shading goes, but we still love a bit of graffiti.



Star Wars: KOTOR
Believe the hype – as long as you can take all the stats, this really is the best *Star Wars* game in ages.



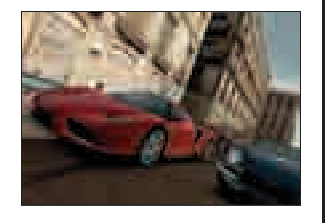
VIEWPOINT
GTA: DOUBLE PACK
Even though the success of *GTA* on the Xbox was never in doubt, it's at least comforting to know that both *GTA III* and *Vice City* are quality titles and thus deserve to do well. Any Xbox owner without this in their collection obviously needs their head read.



VIEWPOINT
BALDUR'S GATE: DARK ALLIANCE II
More an evolution of a standing theme rather than trying to reinvent it, the latest *D&D*-style adventure in the *Baldur's Gate* series is certainly worth picking up if you're a fan of the genre. Dig out the 20-sided dice again.



VIEWPOINT
PROJECT GOTHAM RACING 2
Thanks to certain members of the team finally coughing up for the joys of Xbox Live, there's been a sudden resurgence of *PGR2* playing this month. And lo, the crashing into barriers and swearing lots did commence.



ESSENTIALS

TOO MANY GAMES, NOT ENOUGH MONEY. THANKFULLY, NOT ALL OF THEM ARE WORTH SPENDING YOUR HARD-EARNED CASH ON. IF YOU WANT TO TASTE THE CREAM OF THE CROP, YOU'VE COME TO THE RIGHT PLACE…

GAMECUBE

MANUFACTURER Nintendo **UK LAUNCH DATE** 3 May 2002 **MEDIA** 3-inch Optical Disc **CURRENT PRICE** £79.99



Though the GameCube seems destined to struggle, Nintendo's box of delights is still worth a look. While third-party support is dwindling, it's the first-party releases that really offer some quality gaming. Nintendo still makes some of the finest games ever, so missing out isn't really an option.

TWENTY MUST-HAVE GAMECUBE GAMES

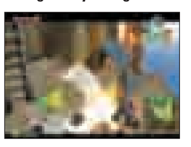
No.	Title	Publisher	Developer	Comment
1	Metroid Prime	Nintendo	In-House	A genre-redefining title in every sense
2	Zelda: The Wind Waker	Nintendo	In-House	One of the many reasons to own a GameCube
3	F-Zero GX	Nintendo	Amusement Vision	SEGA does it again with a brilliant retro remake
4	Winning Eleven 6 IMPORT	Konami	In-House	The closest you'll get to *Pro Evolution*
5	Super Monkey Ball 2	SEGA	Amusement Vision	Monkeys and balls – what more could you want?
6	TimeSplitters 2	Eidos	Free Radical	More multiplayer fun than most other FPS games
7	Mario Kart: Double Dash!!	Nintendo	In-House	Another great moment in gaming from Nintendo
8	Ikaruga	Treasure	In-House	Hard as nails and incredibly addictive
9	Viewtiful Joe	Capcom	In-House	Looks great, plays even better
10	Eternal Darkness	Nintendo	Silicon Knights	Scary in a different sense – very intriguing
11	Soul Calibur II	Namco	In-House	The leader of the pack when it comes to swordplay
12	Mario Golf: Toadstool Tour IMPORT	Nintendo	Camelot	Golfing fun without the need for Tiger Woods
13	Resident Evil	Capcom	In-House	Still as scary as it was when it first came out
14	Resident Evil Zero	Capcom	In-House	An interesting twist on the *Resident Evil* franchise
15	Skies Of Arcadia Legends	SEGA	Overworks	Absorbing RPG action with added 'arrrr' factor
16	Final Fantasy: Crystal Chronicles	Nintendo	Square-Enix	Different from the norm, with a distinct multiplayer flavour
17	Mario Party 5	Nintendo	In-House	Mini-game goodness, whether alone or with friends
18	1080° Avalanche	Nintendo	In-House	A markedly different game to the competition
19	Star Wars: Rogue Leader	Activision	Factor 5	Forget the follow-up – the original still has the edge
20	Animal Crossing IMPORT	Nintendo	In-House	The only game to keep us playing for a full year

NOW UP ABOVE

Metroid Prime
The only game so far to score a perfect ten in the magazine – shouldn't that tell you something?



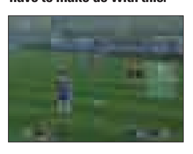
Zelda: The Wind Waker
Forget what people said about Link's new cel-shaded look being bad – they were wrong. Really wrong.



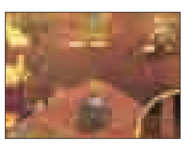
F-Zero GX
Faster than a speeding bullet? Oh yes. In fact, *F-Zero* is faster than a speeding bullet that's already late.



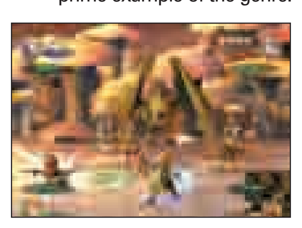
Winning Eleven 6: Final Evolution
***Pro Evo*'s never coming out on the Cube, so you'll have to make do with this.**



Super Monkey Ball 2
Any game with monkeys in it is great – that's the law. But then we'd still love this even if we didn't have to.



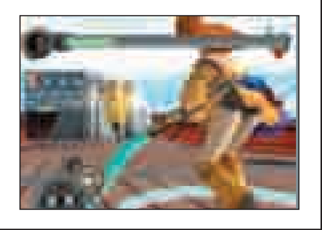
VIEWPOINT
FINAL FANTASY: CRYSTAL CHRONICLES
Surprised that this one hasn't charted higher? So are we – but there's no denying the game's flaws. Still, if it's a quality RPG to enjoy with friends that you're after, this is undoubtedly a prime example of the genre.

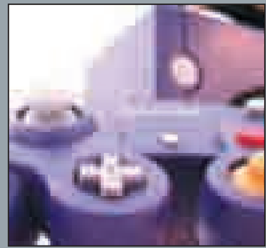


VIEWPOINT
NFL STREET
Okay, so perhaps EA's attempt to broaden the *Street* franchise wasn't quite as successful as we might have hoped but that doesn't mean it's bad. And there's not much in the way of arcade-style American football games anyway.



VIEWPOINT
SKIES OF ARCADIA LEGENDS
Having gone back to this one after leaving it unfinished many moons ago, we're pleased that SEGA's pirate adventure hasn't lost any of its edge. Of course, actually finishing it takes more than a little patience and skill.






GBA

MANUFACTURER Nintendo **UK LAUNCH DATE** 22 June 2001
MEDIA Flash Cartridge **CURRENT PRICE** £89.99



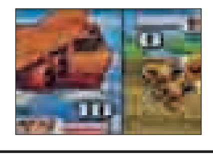
Ideal for gaming on the move, the GBA is a cheap and effective way of getting games to those who don't have time to sit down and play. The leaps in handheld technology mean that GBA games are now more accomplished and can even be compared favourably to their console-based cousins. The lovely SP model is also available now in a variety of colours.

TWENTY MUST-HAVE GAME BOY ADVANCE GAMES

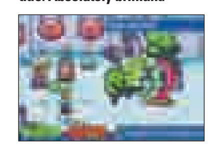
No.	Title	Publisher	Developer
1	Advance Wars 2	Nintendo	In-House
2	Mario & Luigi: Superstar Saga	Nintendo	AlphaDream
3	Zelda: A Link To The Past/Four Swords	Nintendo	In-House
4	Final Fantasy Tactics Advance	Nintendo	Square-Enix
5	Super Mario Advance 3: Yoshi's Island	Nintendo	In-House
6	Golden Sun: The Lost Age	Nintendo	Camelot
7	Metroid Fusion	Nintendo	In-House
8	Fire Emblem	Nintendo	In-House
9	Castlevania: Aria Of Sorrow	Konami	In-House
10	Pokémon Ruby / Sapphire	Nintendo	In-House
11	Speedball 2: Brutal Deluxe	Wanadoo	Crawfish
12	Street Fighter Alpha 3	Ubisoft	Crawfish
13	Yu-Gi-Oh!: Stairway To The Destined Duel	Konami	In-House
14	Super Mario Advance 4: SMB 3	Nintendo	In-House
15	Pinball Challenge Deluxe	Ubisoft	Binary 9
16	Pokémon Pinball: Ruby And Sapphire	Nintendo	In-House
17	Legend Of Stafi	Nintendo IMPORT	In-House
18	Boktai: The Sun Is In Your Hand	Konami	In-House
19	Medal Of Honor: Infiltrator	Electronic Arts	In-House
20	Wario Ware Inc: Mega Microgame$	Nintendo	In-House

AND DOWN BELOW

Advance Wars 2
You wouldn't think that strategy games would be so much fun, but this one's so addictive it's scary.



Mario & Luigi
A genuinely fresh and playable *Mario* game that's not a remake of an old SNES title. Absolutely brilliant.



Zelda: Link To The Past
The SNES port is fantastic on its own, but combine that with *Four Swords* and you've got an unmissable title.



PC

MANUFACTURER N/A **UK LAUNCH DATE** N/A
MEDIA 4.75-inch CD/DVD Disc **CURRENT PRICE** £variable



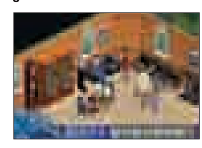
While primarily bought as a work platform, the PC has swiftly become the haven of the more 'mature' gamer. With its natural ability for online and LAN play, it's perfectly tailored for the FPS, strategy and MMORPG genres. However, it can cost a fortune to keep a PC up to date and running fast enough to support flashy graphics.

TWENTY MUST-HAVE PC GAMES

No.	Title	Publisher	Developer
1	The Sims	EA	Maxis
2	Deus Ex	Eidos	Ion Storm
3	Grand Theft Auto: Vice City	Rockstar Games	Rockstar North
4	Championship Manager 03/04	Eidos	Sports Interactive
5	Half-Life	Vivendi	Valve Software
6	Hidden & Dangerous 2	Gathering	Illusion
7	Pro Evolution Soccer 3	Konami	In-House
8	Medieval: Total War	Activision	Creative Assembly
9	Grim Fandango	LucasArts	In-House
10	Rise Of Nations	Microsoft	Big Huge Games
11	System Shock	EA	Looking Glass Games
12	Call Of Duty	Activision	Infinity Ward
13	Sam And Max Hit The Road	Activision	LucasArts
14	Commandos 2: Men Of Courage	Eidos	Pyro
15	Sensible World Of Soccer	Sensible Software	Renegade
16	Operation Flashpoint	Codemasters	In-House
17	Day of Defeat	Activision	Valve Software
18	Tron 2.0	Buena Vista	Monolith
19	Battlefield 1942	EA	Digital Illusions
20	Unreal Tournament 2003	Atari	Epic Games

OOH... TOO SLOW

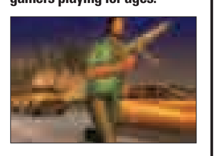
The Sims
Milked for all it's worth and yet still as great as it was when it first appeared. You've got to love *The Sims*.



Deus Ex
Freeform gaming as it was meant to be; if only all games were this way. We can't wait for the sequel to arrive.



GTA: Vice City
Looks better than its PS2 cousin and still has just as much 'cool' factor to keep PC gamers playing for ages.



PERIPHERALS

THEY MAY NOT BE EVERYONE'S CUP OF TEA, BUT EACH CONSOLE HAS ITS OWN MUST-HAVE PERIPHERALS – THOSE LITTLE EXTRAS THAT MAKE THE GAMING EXPERIENCE ALL THE MORE PLEASURABLE. CAN YOU KEEP YOUR HANDS OFF THEM?

GC-TO-GBA LINK CABLE

Console: GameCube
From: Nintendo
Price: £9.99
Available: Now

Nintendo's little purple cable hasn't appeared in this section before – probably because we haven't had much reason to feature it. However, if there was any time that GameCube owners needed to own a GC-to-GBA Link Cable, it would be now – there are enough decent games coming out that use the link cable to warrant picking one up, particularly at such a low price. Whether you're looking to have a quick blast on *Pac-Man VS*, settle in for the night with some friends on *Final Fantasy: Crystal Chronicles*, or have the patience to wait for *Zelda: Four Swords* (which, surprising as it may seem, is actually worth it), there's certainly something for everyone; and after waiting for ages, it looks like Nintendo is finally delivering on its connectivity promise. Good things do come to those who wait…

RADEON 9800XT GRAPHICS CARD



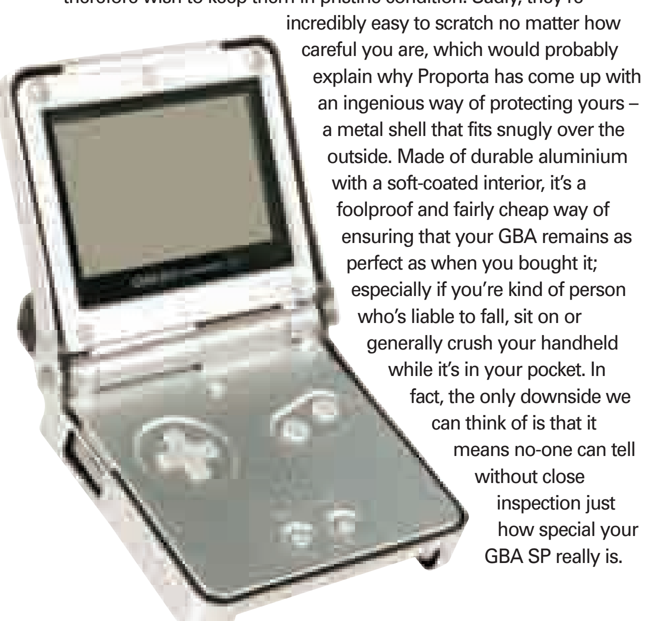
Console: PC
From: Creative
Price: £399.99
Available: Now

PC technology changes fast, so it's always nice to find a bit of kit that won't be out of date before you get it out of the box. Enter Creative's new ATi-based Radeon 9800XT graphics card – a piece of hardware that's not only aimed at people looking to play games at the height of graphical quality, but also looks to be advanced enough to be around for some time. As you might expect from something so high-spec, it really makes a difference; graphically intense titles such as *Deus Ex: Invisible War* and *Beyond Good & Evil* literally fly, while anything less can be pushed to the maximum parameters without a flicker (providing the rest of your PC is up to scratch, of course). Combine that with the free *Half-Life 2* offer in the box and you've got an investment that won't need replacing for a while.

ALUMINIUM GBA SP CASE

Console: Game Boy Advance SP
From: Proporta
Price: £9.99
Available: Now

While the condition of your GBA SP might not be the highest priority on your agenda, there are those of us who are devoted to our beloved handhelds (particularly the limited-edition Japanese SPs) and therefore wish to keep them in pristine condition. Sadly, they're incredibly easy to scratch no matter how careful you are, which would probably explain why Proporta has come up with an ingenious way of protecting yours – a metal shell that fits snugly over the outside. Made of durable aluminium with a soft-coated interior, it's a foolproof and fairly cheap way of ensuring that your GBA remains as perfect as when you bought it; especially if you're kind of person who's liable to fall, sit on or generally crush your handheld while it's in your pocket. In fact, the only downside we can think of is that it means no-one can tell without close inspection just how special your GBA SP really is.



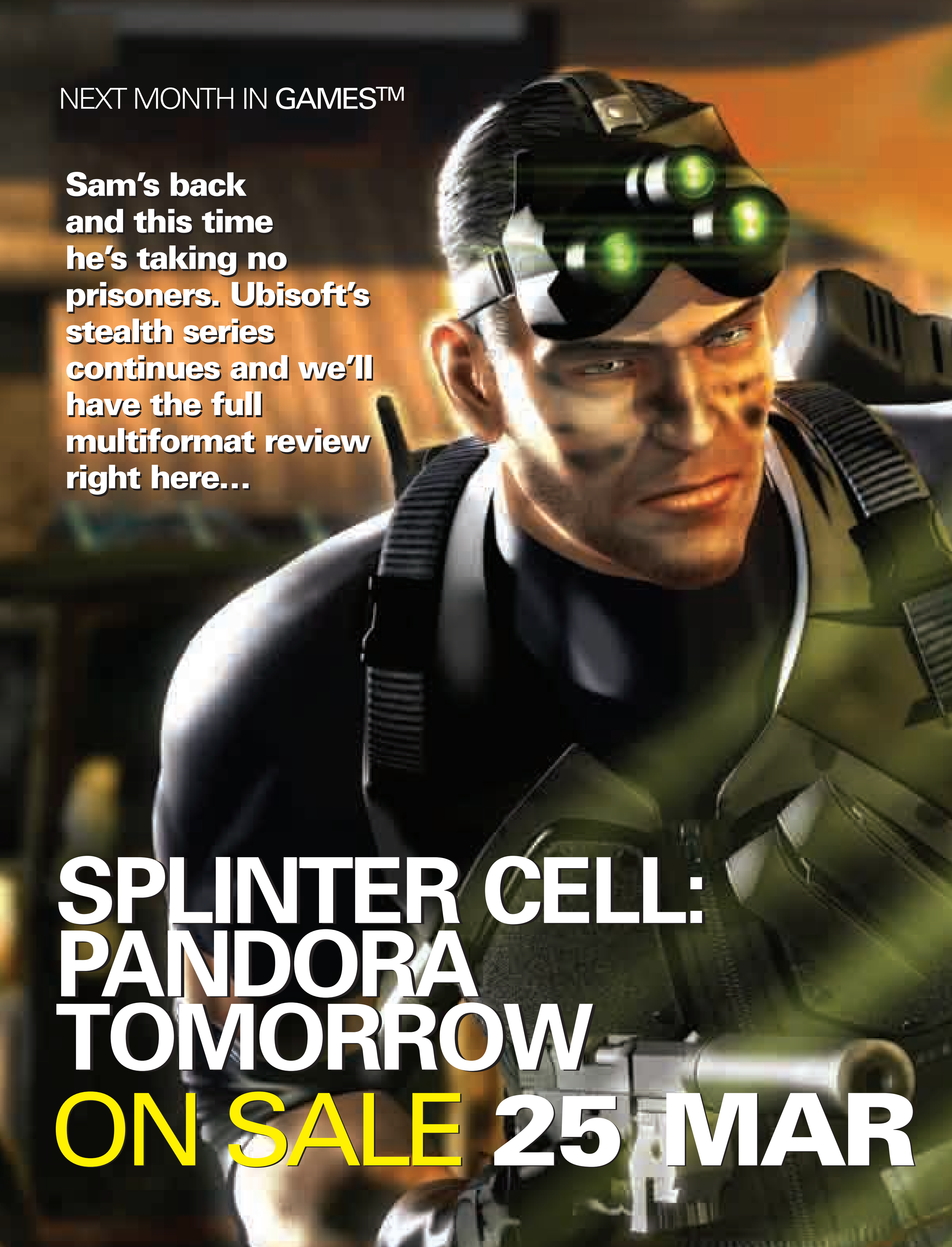
WIRELESS ANALOGUE CONTROLLERS



Console: PlayStation2/Xbox
From: Joytech
Price: £24.99/£29.99
Available: Now

Thanks to the likes of Nintendo's WaveBird, it seems that every peripheral manufacturer is now leaping onto the wireless controller bandwagon. Of course, the biggest problem isn't so much the wireless part as the design; the addition of elements like batteries and rumble functions makes it hard to create anything small and sleek. However, Joytech appears to have done a rather good job of combining the design of its Advanced Analog PS2 and Neo-S Xbox pads with state-of-the-art wireless technology that, scarily enough, is remarkably similar to that used in tactical missiles. And it's done so without losing battery life or making a pad that's unwieldy. While we're not so sure about the faux-rubber coating on both pads, they're certainly the best examples of the technology we've seen so far… until Sony and Microsoft get around to producing their own, of course.


eMag


NEXT MONTH IN GAMES™
Sam's back and this time he's taking no prisoners. Ubisoft's stealth series continues and we'll have the full multiformat review right here…
SPLINTER CELL: PANDORA TOMORROW
ON SALE 25 MAR



NEXT MONTH

MORE… PREVIEWS

We're already on the road to E3, with just over two months until the big event. What can you expect to see there? Well, just sit down and we'll tell you.

MORE… REVIEWS

Plenty to play, but can we fit it all in? Hopefully, we'll bring you opinions on *Metroid: Zero Mission, Ollie King, Harvest Moon GC* and *Headhunter: Redemption* for starters…

MORE… FEATURES

Fingers crossed, we'll be going Japan-crazy as we take a trip to Square Enix, talk to some very enthusiastic Japanese developers about their upcoming games and discover exactly why most consumer electronics shows are disappointing the public these days.

Please note: Due to unforseeable circumstances and last-minute hitches and stuff, we can't guarantee that the next issue will contain all these things. But it will have *something* in it…

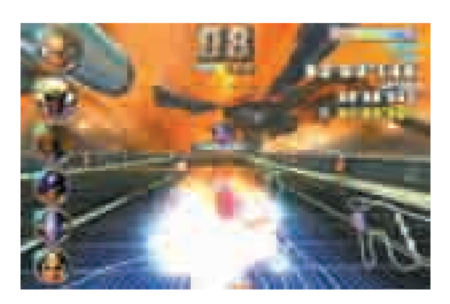
CONTACT

ILLUMINATING THE WORLD OF games™

THE COLLECTIVE CONSCIENCE OF GAMES™ READERS COMBINES TO PRODUCE FOUR PAGES OF WIT, WISDOM AND THOUGHTS ABOUT VIDEOGAMES…



Multiformat releases, the future of videogaming and using the Action Replay to gain the Speed 12 on *Project Gotham 2* – these things and more are at the forefront of your minds.



MAKING CONTACT

There are many wonderful ways to get in touch with games™. The traditional postal method is perfectly acceptable using the address below:

games™
Highbury Entertainment Ltd
Paragon House
St Peter's Road
Bournemouth
BH1 2JS

However, there are quicker ways to reach us thanks to the technological marvel that is the internet. Email us at this address: **gamestm@paragon.co.uk**

Alternatively, why not get yourself on our dedicated forum? Here you should be shielded from multiple spams and infantile remarks. Access to the site has been password protected and only those of you who read **games™** will be able to get onto the site – and if you have bought this magazine then you're not the sort to be abusive and childish, are you? Follow these quick steps to getting on the **games™** forum and enjoy hassle-free chatting with those of us who share a passion for gaming.

Step One:
Get yourself online. It's fairly simple, so we're sure you'll think of something.

Step Two:
Type the following into the browser window: **www.totalgames.net**
You will arrive at the Totalgames website. From here click on the 'forum' icon. News users will have to register via the 'new user' icon – it's a simple step-by-step process which we're sure you can manage.

Step Three:
Once registered, simply email **gamestm@paragon.co.uk** with the password '**Chronicle**' and your username. Then a whole world of sophisticated wit and games chat will be yours. It says here.

LUDDITE! MOI? (CONTACT, issue 13) Hang on, I'm catholic in my approach to games: a good game is a good game whenever it was made. The point I was trying to make is that online gaming is more about making money than improving games. I sincerely hope that **games™** is correct when it states that "online gaming will never replace 'proper' gaming" (with the caveat of 'proper' gamers willing to play them), but a poor-selling game can cripple a company. Witness the *Tomb Raider* franchise being taken from the UK to the 'safety' of the States after a poor iteration. If companies can significantly reduce their production costs and therefore the risk attached to a product by not selling it as a physical product, they will do it.

I truly believe we will get to the stage when you go into Dixons and collect your free PlayStation Unlimited with your annual subscription to Sony Online, then go home and play your games on what will basically be a 'dumb' terminal, to be replaced and made useless at the whim of Sony.

As for 'spending more time with my wife'? An interesting, though perhaps barbed, point you make. My games collection is available in its entirety whenever I want it. If I leave a game for five years (I recently re-discovered my copy of *New Zealand Story* for the Amiga) it's still there ready for me to play. But if you're paying for something 24/7 whether you use it or not, and you only have a finite time before it disappears, it's not improbable some will spend a lot less time with their partners and more time getting the money's worth. Me? If I don't play it today, it'll be there tomorrow. Can Dreamcast owners say that about *Chu-Chu Rocket!* online? Besides, relationship advice from games journos? I suppose it'll be exercise tips next!
Roland Casewell

games™: If you're right (which we don't think you are) and games were piped directly into your living room, then publishers of consoles and games would lose most of their presence on the high street and gaming would become an underground activity. We're pretty certain that Sony, Microsoft, Nintendo, EA and every other publisher is in it for the money, so losing retail support and point-of-sale seems pretty unlikely.

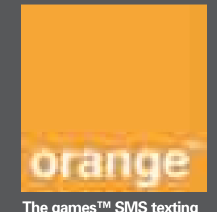
What you also fail to acknowledge is that the people who buy games affect the games that are sold, how they're sold, where they're sold and what medium they're presented on – it's why Nintendo ditched the cartridge, it's why Game is making a mint and, assuming gamers want tangible discs rather than nebulous code, it's yet another reason why games will never just be available just via downloads. If games do become 'download only' not only will we have to buy a machine with a hard drive the size of Belgium (and that won't come cheap) but we'll have to occasionally erase games to buy new ones. And that's A Bad Thing.

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Cheating on Live *PGR2*? Get the hell off, then. If you didn't earn it, don't drive it.

As for *your* barbed comments about our fitness, we'll have you know that when the lift broke down the other week almost half of us walked up the stairs to our third-floor office rather than going home and waiting for the repair man to come out. So there…

☐ **HAVING OWNED ALL** three current 'next-gen' consoles I have found that two of the three are virtually redundant. I purchased the PS2 and GC on their release but held out on the Xbox for about six months after its release. Last October I realised that it had been a while since I had played on either the PS2 or the GameCube, so I sold them both along with all my games. I have to say I haven't missed either of them one bit.

I feel very strongly that the PS2 and GC have been host to some of the most terrible or over-hyped games ever to grace home consoles (*The Getaway*, *Angel Of Darkness*, *Wind Waker*, *Metroid Prime*). I have been left feeling cheated of my hard-earned cash. There have been some amazing games too (*Ico*), but they are so few and far between that I just can't be bothered to wade through the crap to get to them.

The Xbox has proved itself to be the console of choice for both the casual and serious gamer alike and its online support is in a league of its own. Better sound, graphics and exclusive games elevate it above the PS2 and GC without any doubt. I know I sound like a crazed Xbox devotee but this is coming from someone who a) owned all three major consoles and b) had serious misgivings about the Xbox on its release.

Microsoft has won me round completely just simply by being better than the competition. Bring on *Ninja Gaiden*, *Deus Ex: Invisible War*, *Full Spectrum Warrior* and *DOA Online*!

Mark Palmer

games™: You are Bill Gates and we claim our £5… No, really, there's nothing wrong with expressing a preference, and we've found that plenty of games on the PS2 and Cube are lacking. Though we could take you to task over some of the 'over-hyped' games that you have suggested, we think that owning more than one console (if you can afford it) gives you the best of all worlds. There's *Gran Turismo 3* and *Killzone* exclusive to the PlayStation2 this year, and what about the likes of *F-Zero GX* and *Super Monkey Ball*? They're either already great, or bound to be so, and they'll never appear on the Xbox. We think…

☐ **I OWN THE** Action Replay for the Xbox and do so for one reason – I like to play games on Live. However, I don't have the free time to work my way through the World Kudos Championship in *Project Gotham Racing 2* and get all the Platinum Medals as I have a full-time job and other commitments.

I, like many others, do not see this as cheating as having the best car in the game does not make you a better driver, indeed I am not all that good at the game although I enjoy every chance I get to play it. I have on many occasions been asked if I earned the car and when I tell them that I used the Action Replay I am often booted from the game.

Now, if I was playing in *Rainbow Six* and was cheating using the Action Replay to

CONTACT

ILLUMINATING THE WORLD OF gamesTM

TEXT LIFE...

☐ Y don't makers of games make gud games of movies? Take shrek 4instants a gud movie in all accounts, but a rubbish game on all consoles. Wot do u think?
gamesTM: They don't need to – people will buy movie licences regardless. Well, *we* wouldn't, but you know what we mean.

☐ How will developers ever cope with the graphical expectations placed upon them in the generations to come? Maybe an end to sub par games?
gamesTM: Doubtful. Graphics have improved every year that videogames have ever existed, and yet we still have to endure bad games.

☐ The dreamcast isn't dead, its just sleeping.along wiv the spectrum & the c64.
gamesTM: No console or gaming hardware is ever dead providing people are still enjoying the games that were developed for it.

☐ hya GAMES mag, do u know how come i can still surf the net with my Sega Dreamcast but my online games like PlanetRing or Quake3 wont play online!
gamesTM: The servers that hosted those games have been closed down. Sorry.

☐ They should make a sequel to Ico & call it Ico 2: underground. Then change the character 2a sexy kick-ass chick, set it in WW2 & include lots of stealth action.
gamesTM: We like what you did there.

☐ Mario Kart double dash is the most f*****g frustrating game in the world.I have never been more p****d off by a game before than the all cup tour in 150cc.Sorry
gamesTM: That's okay, we're glad that you got that off your chest.

☐ Konnichiwa. Watashi wa Nihongo benkyo desu. Demo totemo tsumaranai desu yo..! What do u think.. Its only 2 meet Japanese chicks really..
gamesTM: We really hope that isn't rude.

☐ Bill Gates is a gay homosexual:-)
gamesTM: As opposed to a straight one? Grow up, fool.

☐ Can u tell me the winning lottery numbers, u seem to know everything else
gamesTM: If we knew the winning lottery numbers do you think we'd still be working like navvies to produce this magazine?

"THERE IS A PROBLEM WITH OBESITY IN THE UK BUT IT'S NOT CAUSED BY CONSOLES – IT'S DOWN TO BAD PARENTING AND POOR DIET"

give me infinite health then I would expect to get booted and have negative feedback left, as this would be a clear advantage over the other players and I would consider that to be cheating.

So am I a cheat for using a tool that gives me the opportunity to use what little time I have for playing games in the way I that enjoy most? In using an Action Replay all I'm really doing is avoiding having to compete against the CPU so that I have all the cars available to me online.

Ewan Fisher

gamesTM: Yup, you are a cheat, you girt plank. Although your argument was almost

LETTER OF THE MONTH

☐ **IN A RECENT** games championship in South Korea, a high-ranking government official opened the event, giving a speech on the importance of the games industry to the country, stressing the positive aspects of social gaming. In Japan and Asia any perceived social problems caused by gaming are met with measured and sensible policies, carried out without media hysteria.

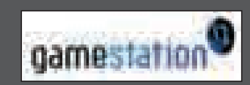
How sad, then, that in Britain we are constantly told by under-informed newspapers and scapegoat-seeking government ministers that videogames are responsible for creating a generation of morbidly obese, socially dysfunctional, violent children who have had their minds decayed by a steady stream of blood-soaked, irresponsible games.

I am tired of my pastime being viewed as the cause of the latest breakdown of society. Common sense dictates that playing games 24 hours a day, with no exercise and surviving on a diet of junk food, will lead to obesity. The vast majority of gamers realised this from the dawn of home systems. I take exercise and watch what I eat as well as playing games. I, like most 20-something gamers, lead a healthy social life that does not revolve around gaming, nor have I ever had any violent impulses from playing games.

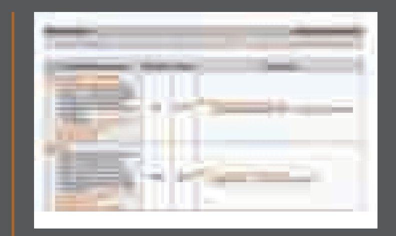
There is a problem with obesity in this country but it is not caused by consoles – it's down to bad parenting, poor diet and the worst access to sports and leisure activities for underprivileged children in Western Europe. Japan has possibly the highest percentage of young people playing games, yet the lowest level of obesity in the Western world, so perhaps the *Daily Mail* should search for another scapegoat in the 'breakdown' of British society.

Rob Dean

gamesTM: Good point, well made. Why not swap your £100 of Gamestation vouchers with a friend for some cash, then buy a hundred copies of the Daily Mail and bury them in a peat bog somewhere? Though this is not compulsory.



If you'd like to line your pockets with £100 of Gamestation vouchers then send us a games-related letter crammed with sparkling wit and pertinent points. Extra marks will be awarded for neat handwriting.



FROM THE FORUM

GO ON, LIVE A LITTLE – TRY SOMETHING DIFFERENT

Jetman
Up until a few years ago, I was quite narrow-minded when it came to what games I would play. I didn't stray far from the usual FPS, adventure and racing genres and I was quite a happy gamer. I'd read about other types of games/genres but did not really take much notice. That changed when I bought *Animal Crossing* in 2002. Looking back at it, I can now see that it was quite a limiting game but the amount of enjoyment I got out of it was staggering. And so began my enjoyment of different genres that I previously wouldn't have touched. Has anybody else tried a game from a different genre and been amazed at it ? Or did you realise why you didn't like that genre in the first place ?

feltmonkey
I always used to steer clear of PC RPGs. I was put off by the beardiness of them, and the presence of kobolds. However, one day I decided to try *Baldur's Gate*. I'm now a complete Bioware/Black Isle fanatic. I can't wait for *Jade Empire*! Also, I couldn't see the point of rhythm games until I picked up a cheap copy of *Space Channel 5* and was surprised how much I enjoyed it. Up, down, left, right, chu chu chu! I don't have a huge collection of rhythm games, though – *Gitaroo Man* is the only other one I like.

mallorn
I always do. I never play similar types of game after I've finished one. I specifically look for something different. In the last few months I've played *Indiana Jones And The Emperor's Tomb, Worms 3D, MOH: Rising Sun, Syberia, Jak & Daxter, Dragon's Blood* (DC), *Tekken 4, Shadowman 2* and *Gungriffon Blaze*. I've also got *DOA2* (DC), *C&C: Retaliation, GT3* and *Ace Combat 4* still on the go. I've also just started *GTA III*, a game that really isn't the sort of thing I normally go for.

4m3
I don't have any particular preference of game type. When I buy a new console I find that the purchases that come after the 'must haves' are one from each of the classic genres: racing, action adventure, shooter, puzzle and RPG. I suppose it feels like you're covering all the bases.

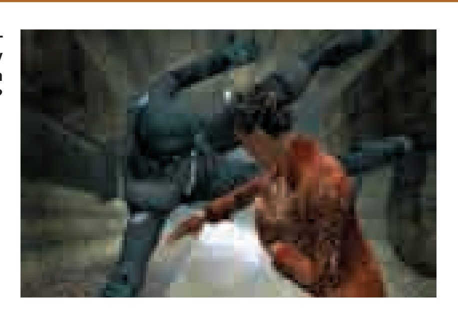
Jetman
What's handy is when games get a budget release (£15 or less), such as *Gregory Horror, Flipnic, Mr Moskeeto* etc. For that sort of money, I'm more likely to take a chance on a different genre.

The_Gamer
This past year, I've been picking up lots of quirky games, like *Viewtiful Joe, Monkey Ball* and *Billy Hatcher*, and I'm so glad I did. Each of them is wonderful to play.

feltmonkey
I always go for quirky games. Maybe, to be different, I should go for something dull and generic like *Medal Of Honor*.

The_Gamer
You can't spell "shameless cash-in" without EA…

ApocalypseDude
I've just tried something different. I've been sent promo copies of *Need For Speed Underground* and *Pop Idol*. *NFSU*? Very average. But to be fair, I don't like traditional racers (if it's not racing in stupidly fast hovercars or involving red shells, I'm not bothered). I tried something different, it blew, now I'm back on *Arkanoid*. As for *Pop Idol* – I'm sure I've seen a cheat that makes Bill Rizer and Lucia come flying through the window on their *Contra*-bikes and set fire to Simon Cowell. So I'm not playing it until I find that cheat again. I'm sure it wasn't a dream.



***Enter The Matrix* – have too many gamers been brainwashed ?**

persuasive. We do appreciate why, in this specific instance, you have opted to cheat. Gaining the Speed 12 legitimately in *PGR2* is incredibly difficult – we doubt that most people will have the time or the skill to complete the game on the Platinum level. However, Xbox Live is a community and most people playing *PGR2* online are playing by the rules. This is partly because most people want to enjoy the satisfaction of earning the car by playing through the game, but it's also because most people have had bad experiences of the cheating morons who race with the Speed 12 on Live but don't possess the skills to drive. Most of the cheats on Live using the Speed 12 ruin other people's games by either crashing at every corner (usually taking out other racers) or winning races because the car is so much faster than any of the others. It's hardly fair, is it? And you have the nerve to whinge about being booted…

THE ARTICLE 'WHERE Is The Love?' (issue 15) raised some intriguing points. I'm certainly one who prefers emotive content in my games because it's a sign of quality and creativity, but you have to question whether striving for real emotional responses is worthwhile. It's surely a positive step, yet most developers fail to see their titles enjoy any significant market success.

In fairness, these efforts can only be fruitful provided we make the right choice. It's simply not enough to lavish praise – kudos is scant consolation when a game sells poorly. If the trend continues it must seem futile for software houses to embrace originality, since it suggests a lack of strategic foresight in an ever-competitive industry. Financial stability provided by movie tie-ins or 'annual recycling' is the driving imperative here and it's the same stability that, ironically, often paves the way for more adventurous titles to come to light.

But what can be done to make gamers care more? Essentially it's in the hands of development teams to provide, journalists to inform and you and I to make sure it operates as a steady model.

With the overwhelming success of mediocre titles, we might see the responsible and discerning gamer soon shudder and retreat, only to volley a curse at those with a fleeting love affair with the Xmas rush. I won't ever condone elitism, nor do I consider myself swayed by hype, but I have, on the odd occasion, delivered a quiet word of advice – usually in the ear of some hasty young pilgrim found browsing for games. Heed my words; the factions have amassed in the East.
Karyl Alexander

games™: Yay and verily it came to pass that the shoppes were full of bad games. And there was wailing and gnashing of teeth… You talk a good medieval-RPG-style scenario, and while it's laudable to frown upon elitism, it's almost impossible not to take an elitist stance – as a reviews mag it's what we do every month. We agree that it's not on to take an overly precious or snobbish view of gaming, but someone has to champion great games that might get overlooked. As for the worthiness of trying to get emotional depth into games, we think it's worth it – as is striving for originality. Sadly, it's almost a given that 'quirky' games won't sell in big numbers, but if they weren't there we'd be very upset.

“The only thing required for evil to triumph is for good men to do nothing”

